

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

1964
MID-YEAR
EDITION

VOLUME 7

15
SHORT
STORIES

John Dickson Carr
Hugh Pentecost
Anthony Boucher
O. Henry
Michael Gilbert
Thomas Walsh
Donn Byrne
Stuart Palmer
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EXHIBIT

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

1964 MID-YEAR EDITION

Edited by

ELLERY QUEEN

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THE IDEA IN SWAPPING IS TO start out with nothing much and run it up to something. I started it with a buckle without a tongue and a carved peach pit, that day, and swapped it to a kid named Miller for a harmonica that somebody had epped on. Then I swapped that to another kid for a penknife with one blade missing. By an hour after dark, had run my original capital up to a baseball with its outside cover worn off, so I figured I'd put in a pretty good afternoon. Of course, I should have been indoors long before then, as swapping takes time and makes you cover a lot of ground.

I was just in the middle of a deal with the Scanlon kid, when I saw my old man coming. He was still a block away, but he was walking fast so when he's sore, and it's hard to be good business judgment when you're being rushed like that. I guess that's why I let Scanlon high-pressure me into swapping for a piece of junk like he had. It was just somebody's old cast-off glass eye,

that he must have picked up off some ash heap.

"You got a 'nerve!'" I squalled. But I looked over my shoulder and I saw Trouble coming up fast, so I didn't have much time to be choosy.

Scanlon knew he had me. "Yes or no?" he insisted.

"All right, here goes," I growled, and I passed him the peeled baseball, and he passed me the glass eye.

That was about all I had time for before Trouble finally caught up with me. I got swung around in the direction in which I live; by the back of the neck, and I started to move over the ground fast—but only about fifty per cent under my own speed. I didn't mind that, only people's Old Men always have to make such long speeches about everything. I don't know why.

"Haven't I got troubles enough of my own," he said, "without having to go on scouting expeditions looking for you all over the neighborhood every time I get home? Your mother's been hanging out the win-

dow calling you for hours. What time d'ye think it is, anyway?" And all that kind of stuff. I got it for five solid blocks, all the way back to our house, but I just kept thinking about how I got swindled just now, so I got out of having to hear most of it.

I'd never seen him so grouchy before. At least not since that time I busted the candy-store window. Most times when he had to come after me like this, he'd take a lick at the bat himself, if we were playing baseball for instance, and then wink at me and only pretend to bawl me out in front of Ma when we got back. He said he could remember when he was twelve himself, and that shows how good he was, because twenty-three years is a pretty long time to remember, let me tell you. But tonight it was the McCoy. Only I could tell it wasn't me he was sore at so much, it was something else entirely.

By the time we got through supper my mother noticed it too. "Frank," she said after a while, "what's eating you? There's something troubling you, and you can't fool me."

He was drawing lines on the table-cloth with the back of his fork. "I've been demoted," he said.

Like a fool I had to butt in right then, otherwise I could have listened to some more. "What's demoted mean, Pop?" I said. "Is it like when you're put back in school? How can they do that to you, Pop?"

Ma said, "Frankie, you go in and do your homework!"

Just before I closed the door heard her say, kind of scared, "You haven't been put back into blue Frank, have you?"

"No," he said, "but it might just as well have been that."

When they came out after a while they both looked kind of down hearted. They forgot I was in the room or else didn't notice me reading *Black Mask* behind my geography book. She said, "I guess now we have to move out of here."

"Yeah, there's a big difference in the salary."

I pricked up my ears at that. I didn't want to have to move away from here, especially since I was the marbles champion of the block.

"What hurts most about it," he said, "is I know they couldn't find any thing against me on my record. I'm like a burnt sacrifice, the captain practically admitted as much. Whenever the Commissioner gets these brain waves about injecting more efficiency into the division, somebody has to be made the goat. He calls that getting rid of the deadwood. If you haven't cracked six cases in a row single-handed, you're deadwood."

"Well," she said, "maybe it will blow over and they'll reinstate you after a while."

"No," he said, "the only thing that'll save me is a break of some kind, a chance to make a big killin'. Once the order goes through,

on't even be on Homicide any more. What chance'll I have then, unning in lush-workers and dips? What I need is a flashy, hard-to-track murder case."

Gee, I thought, I wish I knew where there was one, so I could tell him about it. What chance did a kid like me have of knowing where there was a murder case—at least that no one else knew about and he could have all to himself? I didn't even know how to begin to look for one, except behind billboards and in vacant lots and places, and I knew there wouldn't be any there. Once in a while you found a dead cat, that was all.

Next morning I waited until Ma was out of the room, and I asked him, "Pop, how does somebody know when a murder case has appened?"

He wasn't paying much attention. Well, they find the body, naturally."

"But suppose the body's been hidden some place where nobody knows about it, then how do they know there was a murder case?"

"Well, if somebody's been missing, hasn't been seen around for some time, that's what first starts them looking."

"But suppose no one even tells in somebody's missing, because nobody noticed it yet, then how could they know where to look?"

"They wouldn't, they'd have to ave some kind of a clue first. A clue some little thing, any little thing,

that don't seem to belong where it's found. It's tough to explain, Frankie; that's the best I can do. It could be some little thing belonging to someone, but the person it belongs to isn't around; then you wonder why he isn't, and what it's doing where you found it instead of where it ought to be."

Just then Ma came back in again, so he said, "You quit bothering your head about that stuff, and stick to your school work. That last report you brought back wasn't so hot, you know." And then he said, more to himself than to me, "One flop in the family is enough."

Gee, it made me feel bad to hear him say that. Ma must have heard him, too. I saw her rest her hand on his shoulder, and kind of push down hard, without saying anything.

I looked the Scanlon kid up after school that afternoon, to ask him about that eye I'd traded off him the night before. It was about the only thing I had in the way of a clue and I couldn't help wondering. . . .

I took it out and looked it over, and I said, "Scanny, d'you suppose anyone ever *used* this? I mean, really wore it in his puss?"

"I dunno," he said. "I guess somebody musta when it was new; that's what they're made for."

"Well, then, why'd he quit using it, why'd he throw it away?"

"I guess he got a new one, that's why he didn't want the old one no more."

"Naw," I said, "because once you've got one of these, you don't need another, except only if it cracks or breaks or something." And we could both see this wasn't cracked or-chipped or anything. "A guy can't see through one of these even when it's new; he just wears it so people won't know his own is missing," I explained. "So why should he change it for a new one, if it's still good?"

He scratched his head without being able to answer. And the more I thought about it, the more excited I started to get.

"D'you suppose something *happened* to the guy that used to own it?" I whispered. I really meant did he suppose the guy that used to own it had been murdered, but I didn't tell him that because I was afraid he'd laugh at me. Anyway, I couldn't figure out why anybody would want to swipe a man's glass eye, even if they did murder him, and then throw it away.

I remembered what my old man had said that morning. A clue is any little thing that don't seem to belong where it's found. If this wasn't a clue, then what was? Maybe I could help him. Find out about somebody being murdered, that nobody else even knew about yet, and tell him about it, and then he could get *re*—whatever that word was I'd heard him and her use.

But before I could find out who it belonged to, I had to find out where it came from first. I said,

"Whereabouts did you find it Scan?"

"I didn't find it," he said. "Who stole you I found it? I swapped it of a guy, just like you swapped it of me."

"Who was he?"

"How do I know? I never seen him before. Some kid that lives on the other side of the gas works down in the tough part of town."

"Let's go over there, try and find him. I want to ask him where *he* got it."

"Come on," he said, "I bet I can show him to you easy. He was a little bit of a runt. He was no good at swapping, either. I cleaned him just like I cleaned you. That's why he had to go inside his father's store and bring out this peeper he didn't have anything else left."

I got sort of disappointed. Maybe this wasn't the right kind of a clue after all. "Oh, does his father sell them kind of glims in his store?"

"Naw, he presses pants."

I got kind of relieved again. Maybe it still was a useful clue.

When we got over there on the other side of the gas works, Scan said, "Here's where I swapped him. I don't know just where his father's store is, but it must be around here some place, because it didn't take him a minute to go back for the glim." He went as far as the corner and looked down the next street and then he said, "I see him! There he is!" And he stretched his mouth wide and let out a pip of a whistle.

A minute later a dark, undersized kid came around the corner. The minute he saw Scanlon he started to argue with him. "You gotta gimme hat thing back I took out of the top yesterday. My father walloped me for picking it up off the ironing board. He says maybe the customer'll come back and ask fer it, and what'll he tell him?"

"Where'd it come from?" I uttered in. I tried to sound tough like imagined my old man did when he questioned suspects.

"I should know. It came out of one of the suits that was brought in to be cleaned."

"From the pocket?"

"Naw. It was sticking in one of the cuffs on the bottom of his pants. They were wide open and needed fastening."

"In the *cuff*?" Scanlon piped up. "Gee, that's a funny place to go round carrying a glass eye in!"

"He didn't know it was down there," I said impatiently. "It musta ounched in without his knowing it, and he brought the suit over to be ressed, and it stayed in there the hole time."

"Aw, how could that happen?"

"Sure it could happen. Once my brother dropped a quarter, and he ever heard it hit the floor; he looked all over for it and couldn't find it. Then when he was taking his pants off that night, it fell out of the cuff. He carried it around with him all day long and never knew it."

Even the tailor's kid backed me

up in this. "Sure," he said, "that could happen. Sometimes a thing rolls around to the back where the cuff is tacked up, and the stitching holds it in. People have different ways of taking their pants off; I've watched it in my father's shop when they're getting a fitting. If they pull them off by the bottom, like most do, that turns them upside down, and if something was caught in the cuff it falls out again. But if they just let them fall down flat by their feet and step out of them, it might still stay in, like this did." He was a smart kid all right, even if his old man was just a tailor and not a detective. I had to hand it to him.

I thought to myself: The only way a thing like that could fall into a man's trouser cuff without him seeing it would be from low down, like if the owner was lying flat on the floor around his feet and he was bending over him shaking him or something. That made it seem like maybe I could dig up a murder in this and help my old man after all. But I had to find out where that eye came from.

I said to the tailor's kid, "Do you think this guy'll come back, that left the suit?" If he'd really murdered someone, maybe he wouldn't. But then if he wasn't coming back, he didn't have to leave the suit to be cleaned in the first place, so that showed he probably was.

"My father promised it for him by tonight," he said.

I wondered if there was any blood

on it. I guessed not, or the guy wouldn't have left it with a tailor. Maybe it was some other kind of a murder, where there wasn't any blood spilled. I said, "Can we come in and look at it?"

Again his shoulder went way up. "It's just a suit," he said. "Didn't you ever see a suit before? All right, come in if you gotta look at it."

We went around the corner and into his father's shop. It was a little dinky place, down in the basement like most of them are. His father was a short little guy, not much taller than me and Scanlon. He was raising a lot of steam from running a hot iron over something.

"This is it, here," the kid said, and he picked up the sleeve of a gray suit hanging there on a rack with two or three others. The cuff had a little scrap of paper pinned to it: "Paulsen—75¢."

"Don't any address go with it?" I said.

"When it's called for and delivered, an address. When it's brought in and left to be picked up, no address, just the name."

His father noticed us handling the suit just then and he got sore all of a sudden and came running at us waving his hands, with the hot iron still left in one. He probably wasn't going to hit us with it, he just forgot to put it down, but it was no time to wait and find out. He hollered, "Keep your hands off those cleaning jobs, you hear me? What you want here? Outside!"

When we quit running, outside the door, and he turned back and went in again, I said to Sammy, that was this kid's name, "You want these five immies I got with me?"

He looked them over. They weren't as good as some of mine, but they were probably better than he was used to. "Why should I say no?" he said.

"All right, then here's what you gotta do. When the customer that left that suit comes in to get it, you tip us off. We'll be waiting down a the corner."

"What do you want from him?" he asked.

"This feller's father is a—" Scanlon started to say. I just kicked him in time, so he'd shut up.

"We're just playing a game," changed it to. I was afraid if we told him, he'd tell his father the first thing, and then his father would probably tell the customer.

"Some game!" he said disgustedly. "All right, when he comes I'll tell you."

He went back inside the shop and we hung around there waiting by the corner. This was about half-past four. At half-past six it was all dark and we were still waiting there. Scanlon kept wanting to give up and go home. "All right, no one keeping you here," I told him. "You go home, I'm staying until that guy shows up. I don't care if it takes a night. You can't expect a civilie to show as much forty-tude as a police officer."

"You're not a police officer," he grumbled.

"My father is, so that makes me practically as good as one." I had him here, so he shut up, and stuck around.

The thing was, I had to go home or supper sooner or later. I couldn't just stay out and keep watch, or I'd get the tar bawled out of me. And I knew he had to, too.

"Look," I said, "you stay here and keep watching for Sammy's signal. I'll beat it back and get my mother to feed me fast. Then I'll come back here again and relieve you, and you can go back to your house and eat. That way we'll be sure of not missing him if he shows up."

"Will they let you out at night during school?" he asked.

"No, but I'll slip out without them knowing it. If the man calls or his suit before I get back, follow him wherever he goes, and then come back and meet me here and tell me where it is."

I ran all the way back to our house, and I told Ma I had to eat right away. She said, "What's your hurry?"

I explained. "Well, we got an awful important exam coming up tomorrow and I gotta study hard tonight."

She looked at me kind of suspicious and even felt my forehead to see if I was running a temperature. "You're actually worried about an exam?" she said. "Well, you may

as well eat now. Your poor father's way out at the ends of the earth; he won't be home until all hours."

I could hardly wait until I got through but then I always eat fast so she didn't notice much difference. Then I grabbed up my books for a bluff and said, "I'm going to study upstairs in my room, it's quieter."

As soon as I got up there I locked the door and then I opened the window and got down to the ground easy by way of that old tree. I'd done it plenty of times before. I ran all the way back to where Scan was waiting.

"He didn't come yet," he said.

"All right, now it's your turn," I told him. Parents are an awful handicap when you're working on a case. I mean, a detective shouldn't have to run home to meals right in the middle of something important. "Come back as soon as you get through," I warned him, "if you want to be in on this."

But he didn't. I found out later he got caught trying to sneak out.

Well, I waited and I waited and I waited, until it was almost ten o'clock. It looked like he wasn't coming for that suit any more tonight, but as long as there was still a light showing in Sammy's father's shop I wasn't going to give up. Once a cop came strolling by and looked me over, like he wondered what a kid my age was doing standing so still by himself on a corner, and I just about curled up and died, but all he said was,

"Whaddye say, son?" and went on his way.

While I was standing there hoping the cop wouldn't come back, Sammy, the tailor's kid, suddenly came up to me in the dark when I least expected it. "What's the matter with you, didn't you see me calling you with my hand?" he said. "That guy just come in for his suit."

I saw someone come up the steps out of the shop just then, with a folded suit slung over his arm; he turned and went up the street the other way.

"That's him. Now gimme the marbles you said."

I spilled them into his hand with my eyes on the guy's back. Even from the back he didn't look like a guy to monkey around with. "Did your old man say anything to him about the eye that popped out of his cuff?" I asked Sammy.

"Did he ask us? So why should we tell him? In my father's business anything that ain't missed, we don't know nothing about."

"Then I guess I'll just keep that old glass eye."

The guy was pretty far down the street by now, so I started after him without waiting to hear any more. I was kind of scared, because now there was a grown-up in it, not just kids any more. I was wishing Scan had come back, so I'd have him along with me. But then I thought maybe it was better he hadn't. The man might notice two kids following him quicker than he would just one.

He kept on going, until we were clear over in a part of town I'd never been in before. He was hard to keep up with, he walked fast and he had longer legs than me. Sometimes I'd think I'd lost him, but the suit over his arm always helped me pick him up again. I think without it I would have lost him sure.

Some of the streets had only about one light on them every two blocks, and between lights they were as black as the dickens. I didn't like the kind of people that seemed to live around here either. One time I passed a lady with yellow hair, with a cigarette in her mouth and swinging her purse around like a lasso. Another time I nearly bumped into a funny thin man hugging a doorway and wiping his hand under his nose like he had a cold.

I couldn't figure out why, if he lived this far away from Sammy's father's shop, the man with the suit had to come all this way over just to leave it to be cleaned. There must have been other tailors that were nearer. I guess he did it so he'd be sure the tailor wouldn't know who he was or where he lived. That looked like he had something to be careful about, didn't it?

Finally the lights got a little better again, and it was a good thing they did; by that time I was all winded, and my left shoe was starting to develop a bad squeak. I could tell ahead of time he was going to look back, by the way he slowed up a little and his shoulder

started to turn around. I ducked down quick behind an ash can standing on the sidewalk. A grown-up couldn't have hidden behind it, but it hid me all over.

I counted ten and then I peeked around it. He was on his way again, so I stood up and kept going myself. He must have stopped and looked back like that because he was getting close to where he lived and he wanted to make sure no one was after him. But, just the same, I wasn't ready for him when he suddenly turned into a doorway and disappeared. I was nearly a block behind him, and I ran like anything to get down there on time, because I couldn't tell from where I'd been just which one of them it was, there were three or four of them that were alike.

The entrances had inside doors, and whichever one he'd just opened had finished closing already, and I couldn't sneak in the hall and listen to hear if the stairs were creaking under him or not. There were names under the letter boxes, but I didn't have any matches and there were no lights outside the doors, so I couldn't tell what they were.

Another thing, if he went that far out of his way to have a suit cleaned, he wouldn't give his right name on that little scrap of paper that was pinned to the sleeve.

Suddenly I got a bright idea. If he lived in the back of the house it wouldn't work, but maybe he had a room in the front. I backed up all

the way across to the other side of the street and stood watching to see if any window would light up. Sure enough one did a minute or two later, a dinky one way up on the top floor of the middle house. I knew that must be his because no one else had gone in there just now.

Right while I was standing there he came to the window and looked down, and caught me staring square up at him with my head-way back. This was one time I couldn't move quick enough to get out of sight. He stared down at me hard, without moving. I got the funniest creepy feeling, like I was looking at a snake or something and couldn't move. Finally I turned my head away as if I hadn't been doing anything, and stuck my hands in my pockets, and shuffled off whistling, as if I didn't know what to do with myself.

Then when I got a little further away, I walked faster and faster, until I'd turned the corner out of sight. I didn't dare look back, but something told me he'd stayed up there at that window the whole time looking after me.

It was pretty late, and this was miles from my own part of town, and I knew I'd better be getting back and put off anything else until tomorrow. At least I'd found out which house he lived in—305 Decatur St. I could come tomorrow with Scanny.

I got back into my room from the outside without any trouble, but

Ma sure had a hard time getting me up for school the next morning.

Scanlon and I got together the minute of three, and we left our books in our school lockers and started out right from there, without bothering to go home first. I told him what I'd found out. Then I said, "We'll find out this guy's name first, and then we'll find out if there's anyone living around there who has a glass eye, and who hasn't been seen lately."

"Who'll we ask?"

"Who do you ask when you want to find out anything? The janitor."

"But suppose he don't want to tell us? Some people don't like to answer questions asked by kids."

I chopped my hand at his arm and said, "I just thought of a swell way! Wait'll we get there, I'll show you."

When we got there I took him across the street first and showed him the window. "That's it, up there on the top floor of the middle house."

We went over and started looking under the letter boxes in the vestibule for his name. I don't think we would have found it so easy, it was hard to tell just which name went with which flat, only I happened to notice one that was a lot like the one he left his suit under at the tailor's: Petersen. "That must be it," I told Scanny. "He just changed the first part of it."

"What do we do now?" he said.

I pushed the bell that said Janitor.

"Now watch," I said, "how I get it out of him."

He was a cranky old codger. "What you boys want?" he barked.

I said, "We been sent over with a message for somebody that lives in this house, but we forgot the name. He's got a glass eye."

He growled, "There's nobody here got a glass eyel"

"Maybe we got the wrong number. Is there anybody around here in the whole neighborhood got a glass eye?"

"Nobody! Now get out of here. I got vurk to do!"

We drifted back to the corner and hung around there feeling kind of disappointed. "It didn't get us nothing," I said. "If no one in his house has one, and if no one in the neighborhood has one, where'd he get it from?"

Scanlon was beginning to lose interest. "Aw, this ain't fun no more," he said. "Let's go back and dig up a game of—"

"This isn't any game," I told him severely. "I'm doing this to help my old man. You go back if you want to, I'm going to keep at it. He says what every good detective has to have is preservance."

"What's 'at, some kind of a jam?" he started to ask, but all of a sudden I saw something and jumped out of sight around the corner.

"Here's that guy now!" I whispered. "He just came out of the house."

We got down in back of a stoop.

There were plenty of people all around us, but nobody paid any attention to us, they thought we were just kids playing a game, I guess.

A minute later this Petersen got to the corner and stood there. I peeked up and got a good look at his face. It was just a face, it didn't look any different from anybody else's. I'd thought until now maybe a murderer ought to have a special kind of a face, but I'd never asked my old man about that, so I wasn't sure. Maybe they didn't, or maybe this guy wasn't a murderer after all, and I was just wasting a lot of good ball time prowling around after him.

He looked around a lot, like he wanted to make sure nobody was noticing him, and then he finally stepped down off the curb, crossed over, and kept going straight along Decatur Street.

"Let's follow him, see where he goes," I said. "I think he saw me last night from the window, and he might remember me, so here's how we better do it. You follow him, and then I'll follow you. I'll stay way back where he can't see me, and just keep you in sight."

We tried that for a while, but all of a sudden I saw Scanlon just standing there waiting for me ahead. "What'd you give up for?" I said when I got to him. "Now you lost him."

"No, I didn't. He just went in there to get somep'n to eat. You can see him sitting in there."

He was sitting in a place with a big glass front, and he was facing our way, so we had to get down low under it and just stick the tops of our heads up. We waited a long time. Finally I said, "He oughta be through by now," and I took another look. He was still just sitting there, with that same one cup still in front of him. "He ain't eating," I told Scanlon, "he's just killing time."

"What do you suppose he's waiting for?"

"Maybe he's waiting for it to get dark." I looked around, and it pretty nearly was already. "Maybe he's going some place that he don't want to go while it's still light, so no one can see him."

Scanlon started to scuff his feet around on the sidewalk like he was getting restless. "I gotta get back soon or I'll catch it," he said. "I'm in Dutch already for trying to sneak out last night."

"Yeah, and then when you do go back," I told him bitterly, "you'll get kept in again like last night. You're a heck of a guy to have for a partner!"

"No, tonight I can make it," he promised. "It's Thursday, and Ma wants to try for a new set of dishes at the movies."

"All right, get back here fast as you can. And while you're there, here's what you do. Call up my house and tell my mother I'm staying for supper at your house. If she asks why, tell her we both got so

much studying to do we decided to do it together. That way I won't have to leave here. This guy can't sit in there forever, and I want to find out where he goes when he does come out. If I'm not here when you come back, wait for me right here, where it says 'Joe's Coffee Spot'."

He beat it for home fast and left me there alone. Just as I thought, he wasn't gone five minutes when the guy inside came out, so I was glad one of us had waited. I flattened myself into a doorway and watched him around the corner of it.

It was good and dark now, like he wanted it to be, I guess, and he started up the street in the same direction he'd been going before—away from that room he lived in. I gave him a half a block start, and then I came out and trailed after him. We were pretty near the edge of town now, and big openings started to show between houses, then pretty soon there were more open places than houses, and finally there weren't any more houses at all, just lots, and then fields, and further ahead some trees.

The street still kept on, though, and once in a while a car would come whizzing by, coming in from the country. He would turn his face the other way each time one did, I noticed, like he didn't want them to get a look at him.

That was one of the main things that kept me going after him. He hadn't been acting right ever since I first started following him the night

before away from the tailor shop. He was too watchful and careful, and he was always looking around too much, like he was afraid of someone doing just what I was doing. People don't walk that way, unless they've done something they shouldn't.

I couldn't stay up on the road out here, because there was no one else on it but him and me and he would have seen me easy. But there were a lot of weeds and things growing alongside of it, and I got off into them and kept going with my back bent even with the tops of them. When they weren't close together I had to make a quick dive from one clump to the next.

Just before he got to where the trees started in, he kind of slowed down, like he wasn't going very much further. I looked all around, but I couldn't see anything, only some kind of old frame house standing way back off the road. It didn't have any lights and didn't look like anyone lived in it. Gee, it was a spooky kind of a place if there ever was one, and I sure hoped he wasn't going anywhere near *there*.

But it looked like he was, only he didn't go straight for it. First he looked both ways, up and down the road, and saw there was no one around—or thought there wasn't. Then he twisted his head and listened, to make sure no car was coming just then. Then he took a quick jump that carried him off the road into the darkness. But I could

still see him a little, because I knew where he'd gone in.

Then, when he'd gotten over to where this tumbledown house was, he went all around it first, very carefully, like he wanted to make sure there was no one hiding in it waiting to grab him. Luckily there were plenty of weeds and bushes growing all around, and it was easy to get up closer to him.

When he'd gotten back around to the front again, and decided there was no one in it—which I could have told him right from the start just by the looks of it—he finally got ready to go in. It had a crazy kind of a porch with a shed over it, sagging way down in the middle between the two posts that held it. He went in under that, and I could hardly see him any more, it was so dark.

I heard him fiddling around with something that sounded like a lock, and then the door wheezed, and scraped back. There was a white something on the porch and he picked it up and took it in with him.

He left the door open a crack behind him, like he was coming out again soon, so I knew enough not to sneak up on the porch and try to peep in. It would have squeaked under me, anyway. But I moved over a little further in the bushes, where I could get a better line on the door. A weak light came on, not a regular light, but a match that he must have lit there on the other side

of the door. But I've got good eyes and it was enough to show me what he was doing. He was picking up a couple of letters that the postman must have shoved under the bottom of the door. He looked at them, and then he seemed to get sore. He rolled them up into a ball with one hand and pitched them way back inside the house. He hadn't even opened them, just looked at the outside.

His match burned out, but he lit another, only this time way back inside some place where I couldn't see him. Then that one went out too, and a minute later the door widened a little and he edged out again as quietly as he'd gone in. He put something down where he'd taken that white thing up from. Then he closed the door real careful after him, looked all around to make sure no one was in sight, and came down off the porch.

I was pretty far out in front of the door, further than I had been when he went in. But I had a big bush to cover me, and I tucked my head down between my knees and made a ball out of myself, to make myself as small as I could, and that was about the sixteenth time he'd missed seeing me. But I forgot about my hand, it was sticking out flat against the ground next to me, to help me balance myself.

He came by so close his pants leg almost brushed my cheek. Just then a car came by along the road, and he stepped quickly back so he

wouldn't be seen. His whole heel came down on two of my fingers.

All I could remember was that if I yelled I would be a goner. I don't know how I kept from it. It felt like a butcher's cleaver had chopped them off. My eyes got all full of water, mixed with stars. He stayed on it maybe half a minute, but it seemed like an hour. Luckily the car was going fast, and he moved forward again. I managed to hold out without moving until he got out to the road.

Then I rolled over on my face, buried it with both arms, and bawled good and hard, but without making any noise. By the time I got that out of my system, it didn't hurt so much any more.

Then I sat up and thought things over, meanwhile blowing on my fingers to cool them. He'd gone back along the road toward the built-up part of town. I didn't know whether to keep on following him or not. If he was only going back where he came from, there didn't seem to be any sense to it, I knew where that was already. I knew he didn't live here in this house, people don't live in two places at once.

What did he want out here then? What had he come here for? He'd acted kind of sore, the way he looked over those letters and then balled them up and fired them down. Like they weren't what he wanted, like he'd had the trouble of coming all the way out here for nothing. He must be waiting for a

letter, a letter that hadn't come yet. I decided to stick around and find out more about this house if I could.

Well, I waited until I couldn't hear him walking along the road any more, then I got up and sneaked up on the porch myself. That thing he had put down outside the door was only an empty milk bottle, like people leave for the milkman to take away with him when he brings the new milk. So that white thing he had picked up at first must have been the same bottle, but with the milk still in it. He must have just taken it in and emptied it out.

What did he want to do a thing like that for? He hadn't been in there long enough to drink it. He just threw it out, and then brought the empty bottle outside again. That showed two things. If the milkman left milk here, then there was supposed to be somebody living here. But if this guy emptied the bottle out, that showed there wasn't anyone living here any more, but he didn't want the milkman or the mailman or anyone else to find out about it yet.

My heart started to pick up speed, and I got all gooseflesh and I whispered to myself: "Maybe he murdered the guy that lives here, and nobody's found out about it yet! I bet that's what it is! I bet *this* is where that eye came from!" The only catch was, why did he keep coming back here afterwards, if he did? The only thing I could figure out was he must want some letter

that he knew was going to show up here, but it hadn't come yet, and he kept coming back at nights to find out if it had been delivered. And maybe the whole time there was someone dead inside there. . . .

I kept saying to myself, "I'm going in there and see if there is. I can get in there easy, even if the door is locked." But for a long time I didn't move.

Finally I said to myself like this: "It's only a house. What can a house do to you? Just shadows and emptiness can't hurt you. And even if there is somebody lying dead in there, dead people can't move any more. You're not a kid any more, you're twelve years and five months old, and besides, your old man needs help. If you go in there you might find out something that'll help him."

I tried the door first, but like I'd thought, it was locked, so I couldn't get in that way. Then I walked slowly all around the outside of the house trying all the windows one after the other. They were up higher than my head, but the clapboards stuck out in lots of places and it was easy to get a toe-hold on them and hoist myself up. That wouldn't work either. They were all latched or nailed down tight on the inside.

Finally I figured I might be able to open one of the top-floor windows, so I went around to the front again, spat on my hands, and shinied up one of the porch posts.

There were some old vine stalks twisted around them, so it was pie getting up. It was so old the whole thing shook bad, but I didn't weigh much, so nothing happened.

I started tugging at one of the windows that looked out over it. It was hard to get it started because it hadn't been opened in so long, but I kept at it, and finally it jarred up. The noise kind of scared me, but I swallowed hard and stuck my legs inside and slid into the room. The place smelled stuffy, and cobwebs tickled my face, but I just brushed them off.

I couldn't see much, just the gray where the walls were and the black where the door was. A grown-up would have had matches, but I had to use my hands out in front of me to tell where I was going.

I didn't bump into anything much, because I guess the upstairs rooms were all empty and there was nothing to bump into. But the floorboards cracked and grunted under me. I had a narrow escape from falling all the way down the stairs and maybe breaking my neck, because they came sooner than I thought they would. After that I went good and easy, tried out each one with my toe first to make sure it was there before I trusted my whole foot down on it. It took a long time getting down that way, but at least I got down in one piece. Then I started for where I thought the front door was. I wanted to get out.

I don't know what mixed me up, whether there was an extra turn in the stairs that I didn't notice in the dark, or I got my directions balled up by tripping a couple of times over empty boxes and picking myself up again. Anyway I kept groping in what I thought was a straight line out from the foot of the stairs, until I came up against a closed door. I thought it was the front door to the house, of course. I tried it, and it came right open. That should have told me it wasn't, because I'd seen him lock it behind him when he left.

The air was even worse on the other side of it than on my side, all damp and earthy like when you've been burrowing under the ground, and it was darker than ever in front of me, so I knew I wasn't looking out on the porch. Instead of backing up I took an extra step through it, just to make sure what it was, and this time I did fall — and, boy, how I fell! Over and over, all the way down a steep flight of brick steps that hurt like anything every time they hit me.

The only thing that saved me was that at the bottom I landed on something soft. Not real soft like a mattress, but kind of soft and at the same time stiff, if you know what I mean. At first I thought it was a bag of some kind, filled with sawdust.

I was just starting to say to myself, "Gee, it's a good thing that was there!" when I put out my hand, to

brace myself for getting up on my feet again, and all of a sudden I turned to ice all over.

My hand had landed right on top of another hand—like it was waiting there to meet it! It wasn't warm and soft like a hand, it felt more like a stiff leather glove that's been soaked in water, but I knew what it was all right. It went on up into a shoulder, and that went up into a neck, and that ended in a head.

I gave a yell, and jumped about a foot in the air and landed further over on another part of the floor. Then I started scrambling around on my hands and knees to get out of there fast.

I couldn't get at the stairs again without stepping over it at the foot of them, and that kept me there a minute or two longer, until I had time to talk to myself. And I had to talk good and hard, believe me.

"He's murdered, because when dead people die regular they're buried, not left to lie at the bottom of cellar steps. So you see, that Petersen *did* murder someone, just like you been suspecting for two whole days. And instead of being scared to death, you ought to be glad you found him, because now you *can* help your old man just like you wanted to. Nobody knows about this yet, not even the milkman or the letterman, and he can have it all to himself."

That braced me up a lot. I wiped the wet off my forehead, and I pulled my belt over to the fourth

tch, which was the last one there s on it. Then I got an idea how ould look at him, and make sure was murdered. I didn't have any itches, but he was a grown-up, en if he was dead, and he just ght have one, in—in his pocket. I started to crawl straight back vard him, and when I got there, I. nched my teeth together real rd, and reached out one hand for out where his pocket ought to be. shook so, it was no good by itself, t I steadied it by holding it with e other hand, and got it in. Then had to go around to the other side him and try that one. He had ree of them in there, those long id. My hand got caught getting out, and I nearly went crazy for minute, but I finally pulled the cket off it with my other hand, d edged back.

Then I scraped one of them along e floor. His face was the first ing I saw. It was all wrinkled and y-like, and it had four black holes it, one more than it should have. ie mouth was a big wide hole, and e nostrils of the nose were two tall ones, and then there was other under one eyelid, or at ist a sort of a hollow place that was st like a hole. He'd worn a glass e in that socket, and it was the ry one I had in my pocket that ry minute. I could see now how 'd come to lose it.

He'd been choked to death with old web belt, from behind when wasn't looking. It was still around

his neck, so tight and twisted you would have had to cut through it to get it off. It made his other eye, which was a real one, stand out all swollen like it was ready to pop out. And I guess that was what really did happen with the fake one. It got loose and dropped out while he was still struggling, down on the floor between the murderer's spread legs, and jumped into his trouser-cuff without him even seeing it. Then, when it was over, he either didn't notice it was missing from the dead man's face, or else thought it had rolled off into a corner and was lying there. Instead it was in the cuff of the suit he had cleaned to make sure it wouldn't have any suspicious dirt or stains on it.

The match was all the way down to my fingertips by now, so I had to blow it out. It had told me all it could. It didn't tell me who the dead old man was, or why that Petersen fellow had killed him. Or what he was after that made him come back again like that. I crept up the brick cellar steps in the dark, feeling like I could never again be as scared as I had been when I first felt that other hand under mine. I was wrong, wait'll you hear.

I found my way back to the front door without much trouble. The real front door, this time. Then I remembered the two letters I'd seen him crumple and throw away. They might tell me who the dead man was. I had to light one of the two

matches I had left to look for them, but the door had no glass in it, just a crack under it, and Petersen must be all the way back in town by now, so I figured it was safe if I didn't keep it lit too long.

I found them right away, and just held the match long enough to smooth them out and read who they were sent to. The dead old man was Thomas Gregory, and that road out there must still be called Decatur Street even this far out, because they said: 1017 Decatur Street. They were just ads. One wanted to know if he wanted to buy a car, the other one wanted to know if he wanted to buy a set of books.

I blew the match out and stuck them up under the lining of my cap. I wanted to take them home and show them to my father, so he'd believe me when I told him I'd found someone murdered way out here. Otherwise he was liable to think I was just making it up.

I found out I couldn't get the door open after all, even from the inside. He'd locked it with Gregory's key and taken that with him. I found another door at the back, but that turned out to be even worse, it had a padlock on it. This Gregory must have been scared of people, or else kind of a crazy hermit, to live all locked up like that, with the windows nailed down and everything. I'd have to go all the way upstairs, climb out, catwalk over that dangerously wobbly porch, and skin down to the ground again.

I'd gotten back about as far where the stairs started up, and just put my foot on the bottom of when I heard a scrunch outside. Then someone stepped on the porch. There was a slithering sound by the door, and a minute later a lit whistle went *tweet!* I nearly jump out of my skin. I don't know which of the three scared me most. I think it was that whispering sound under the door. The only reason I stayed where I was and didn't make break up the stairs was, I could hear steps going away again outside.

I tiptoed to one of the front windows and rubbed a clean spot in the dust and squinted through it. I could see a man walking away from the house back toward the road again. He climbed on a bicycle and rode off. It was only a special delivery mailman.

I waited until he'd rode far enough away, then I groped my way back toward the door, and I could see something white sticking through under it, even in the dark. I got down and pinched it between my thumb and finger, but it wouldn't come through, it seemed to have gotten caught. He hadn't shoved it all the way in, and first I thought maybe it was too thick or had gotten snagged on a splinter.

I opened my fingers for a minute to get a tighter grip, and right when I was looking at it, it started getting smaller and smaller, like it was slipping out the other way. I couldn't understand what was making it

hat, there was no tilt to the sill. When there was only about an inch of it left, I grabbed at it quick, and gave it a tug that brought it in again.

Then all of a sudden I let go of it, and stayed there like I was, without moving and with my heart starting a pound like anything. Without tearing a sound, something had told me all at once that there was someone out there on the other side of that door! I was afraid to touch the door now, but the damage had already been done. That jerk I'd given it was enough to tell him there was someone in here.

Plenty scared, I picked my way back to the window again, as carefully as if I was walking on eggs, to try and see if I could get a side-look at the porch through it. Just as I got to it, one of those things like you see in the movies happened, only this time it wasn't funny. My face came right up against somebody else's. He was trying to look in, while I was trying to look out. Our two faces were right smack up against each other, with just a thin sheet of glass between.

We both jumped together, and he straightened up. He'd been bending down low to look in. Mine stayed down low where it was, and he could tell I was a kid. It was Petersen, I could recognize him even in the faint light out there by the shape of his hat and his pitcher-ears. He must have been waiting around near-by, and had seen the mailman's bike.

We both whisked from the window fast. He jumped for the door and started to stab a key at it. I jumped for the stairs and the only way out there was. Before I could get to them, I went headfirst over an empty packing case. Then I was on them and flashing up them. Just as I cleared the last one, I heard the door swing in below. I might be able to beat him out of the house through the window upstairs, but I didn't give much for my chances of beating him down the road in a straight run. My only hope was to be able to get into those weeds out there ahead of him and then lose myself, and I didn't know how I was going to do it with him right behind me.

I got to the upstairs window just as he got to the bottom step of the stairs. I didn't wait to look, but I think he'd stopped to strike a light so that he could make better time. I straddled the window sill in a big hurry, tearing my pants on a nail as I did. A minute later something much worse happened. Just as I got one foot down on the wooden shed over the porch, and was bringing the other one through the window after me, the two ends went up higher, the middle sank lower, and then the whole business slid to the ground between the two posts that had held it up. Luckily I was still holding onto the window frame with both arms. I pulled myself back just in time and got my leg up on the sill again.

If there'd been a clear space underneath, I would have chanced it and jumped from where I was, although it was a pretty high jump for a kid my size, but the way those jagged ends of splintered wood were sticking up all over, I knew one of them would stab through me sure as anything if I tried it. He'd run back to the door for a minute—I guess at first he thought the whole house was coming down on him—and when he saw that it was just the porch shed, he stuck his head out and around and looked up at me where I was, stranded up there on the window frame.

All he said was, "All right, kid, I've got you now," but he said it in such a calm, quiet way that it scared you more than if he'd cursed.

He went in and started up the stairs again. I ran all around the three sides of the room, looking for a way out, and on the third side I finally found a narrow brick fireplace. I jumped in through that and tried to climb up on the inside. I fell back again to the bottom just as he came into the room. He headed straight over to the fireplace and bent down, and his arm reached in for me and swept back and forth. It missed me the first time, but the second time it got me. There was nothing I could hang onto in there to keep from being pulled out. I came out kicking, and he straightened up and held me by the throat, out where I couldn't reach him with my feet.

He let me swing at his arm with both my fists until I got all tired and then he said in that same quiet deadly way, "What're you doing around here, son?"

"Just playin'," I said.

"Don't you think it's a funny place and a funny time of night for a kid your age to be playing?"

What was the use of answering

He said, "I've seen you before son. I saw you standing on the street looking up at my window last night. You seem to be crossing my path a lot lately. What's the idea?" He shook me till my teeth darn near came out, then he asked me a second time, real slow: "What's the idea?"

"Nothin'," I drooled. My head lolled all around on my shoulders dizzy from the shaking.

"I think there is. Who's your father?"

"Frank Case."

"Who's Frank Case?"

I knew my only chance was no to tell him. I knew if I told him then he'd never let me get out of here alive. But I couldn't help telling him, it made me glad to tell him proud to tell him; I didn't want any mercy from him. "The best damn dick in town!" I spit out at him.

"That's your finish," he said. "So you're a cop's son. Well, a cop's son is just a future cop. Squash them while they're little. Did your father teach you how to go out bravely kid?"

Gee, I hated him! My own voice

ot nearly as husky as if it was hanging already, and it wasn't yet. My father don't have to teach me hat. Just being his kid shows it to ne."

He laughed. "Been down to the ellar yet, son?"

I didn't answer.

"Well, we're going down there now."

I hated him so, I didn't even remember to be scared much any more. You're only scared when here's a chance of not getting hurt, nyway. When there's no chance of ot getting hurt, what's the use of being scared? "And I'm not coming up again any more, am I?" I said lefiantly while he felt his way lown the stairs with me.

"No, you're not coming up again ny more. Glad you know it."

I said, "You can kill me like you lid him, but I'm not afraid of you. My pop and every cop in the city'll et even on you, you dirty murderer, you. You stink!"

We'd gotten down to the first loor by now. It was better than the basement, anyway. I twisted my lead around and got my teeth into his arm, just below the elbow. I kept t up until they darn near came together, through his sleeve and skin, nd muscle. I couldn't even feel him itting me, but I know he was, because all of a sudden I landed flat p against the wall all the way across he room, and my ears hummed.

I heard him say, "You cöpper-
help! If you want it that quick,

here it is!" The white of his shirt showed for a minute, like he'd pushed back his coat to take out something. Then a long tube of fire jumped at me, and there was a sound like thunder in the room.

I'd never heard a gun go off before. It makes you kind of excited. It did me, anyway. I knew the wall was pale in back of me and that was bad because I was outlined against it. I dropped down flat on the floor, and started to shunt off sideways over it, keeping my face turned toward him. I knew another of those tubes of light was coming any second, this time pointed right, pointed low.

He heard the slithering sound my body was making across the floor. He must have thought I was hit but still able to move. He said, "You're hard to finish, ain't you, kid? Why ain't you whimpering? Don't it hurt you?" I just kept swimming sideways on the floor. I heard him say:

"Two shots don't make any more noise than one. I'll make sure this time." He took a step forward and one knee dipped a little. I saw his arm come out and point down at me.

I couldn't help shutting my eyes tight for a minute there on the floor. Then I remembered I was a detective's son and I opened them again right away. Not for any murderer was I going to close my eyes.

The tube of light came again, and the thunder, and a lot of splinters

jumped up right in front of my face. One of them even caught in my lip and hurt like a needle. I couldn't keep quiet even if I wanted to; the way I hated him made me say, real quiet, like I was a grown-up talking to another grown-up, not a kid who knew he was going to die in another minute:

"Gee, you're lousy, mister, for a murderer!"

That was all there was time for. All of a sudden there was a sound like someone ploughing through that mass of wreckage outside the door, and the door swung in and hit back against the wall; he hadn't locked it behind him in his hurry to get his hands on me. For a minute there was complete silence—me flat on the floor, him in the shadows.

Then a low voice that I knew by heart whispered, "Don't shoot, fellows, he may have my kid in there with him."

You could make him out against the lighter sky outside, but he had to have light to see by, or I knew Petersen would get him sure. He was just holding his fire because he didn't want to give away where he was. I had one match left in my pocket from the dead man. But a match goes out if you try to throw it through the air. I got it out of my pocket, and I put its tip to the floor and held it there, ready. Then I drew my legs up under me, reared up on them, and ticked the match off as I straightened. I held it way out across the room toward

Petersen, with my arm stretched a far as it could reach, as it flamed, and it showed him up in smoky orange from head to foot. "Straight ahead of you, Pop!" I yelled.

Petersen's gun started around toward me fast and angry, to put me and my match both out at once, but there's only one thing that can beat a bullet, and that's another bullet. The doorway thundered, and my pop's bullet hit him so hard in the side of the head that he kicked over sideways like a drunk trying to dance, and went nudging his shoulder all the way down the wall to the floor, still smoky-orange from my match to the last.

I stood there holding it, like the Statue of Liberty, until they had a chance to get over to him and make sure he wouldn't still shoot from where he was lying.

But one of them came straight to me, without bothering about him and I knew which one it was all right, dark or no dark. He said "Frankie, are you all right?"

I said, "Sure, I'm all right, Pop."

And the funny part of it was, still was while I was saying it; I was sure I could've gone on all night yet. But all of a sudden when I felt his hands reaching out for me, I felt like I was only twelve years old again and would have to wait a long time yet before I could be a regular detective, and I flopped up against him all loose and went to sleep standing up or something. . .

When I woke up I was in a car

ith him and a couple of the others, ding back downtown again. I arted to talk the minute my eyes ere open, to make sure he hadn't issed any of it, because I wanted get him re—you know that ord.

I said, "Pop, he killed an old iy named Thomas Gregory, he's own—"

"Yeah, we found him, Frankie." "And, Pop, there's a letter under ie front door, which is why he lled him."

"We found that too, Frankie." e took it out of his pocket and owed it to me. It wasn't anything, just an old scrap of pale blue iper.

"It's a certified check for twelve ousand dollars, in payment for a aim he had against a construction mpany as a result of an accident."

My father explained, almost like I as a grown-up instead of a kid, "He as hit in the eye by a steel particle hile he was walking past one of eir buildings under construction. e had to have the eye taken out. hat was five years ago. The suit agged on ever since, while he urned sour and led a hand-to-outh existence in that shack out ere. They fought him to the last tch, but the higher court made em pay damages in the end.

"The day the decision was handed own, some of the papers ran little uibs about it, space-fillers down at e bottom of the page like they do. ne of these evidently caught Pe-

tersen's eye, and he mistakenly thought that meant the check had already come in and the old man had cashed it. He went out there, got himself admitted or forced his way in, probably tortured Gregory first, and when he couldn't get anything out of him, ended up by killing him.

"He was too quick about it. The check didn't come in until tonight, as you saw. He had to keep coming back, watching for it. Once the old man was gone and the check still uncashed, the only thing he could do was take a desperate chance on forging his name to it, and present it for payment, backed up by some credentials taken from Gregory.

"He wasn't very bright or he would have known that he didn't have a chance in a thousand of getting away with anything like that. Banks don't honor checks for that amount, when the payee isn't known to them, without doing a little quiet investigating first. But he wanted *something* out of his murder. He'd killed the old man for nothing. . . . But how in the blazes did *you*—"

So then I took out the glass eye and showed it to him, and told him how I traced it back. I saw them give each other looks and shake their heads sort of surprised over it, and one of them said, "Not bad! Not bad at all!"

"Not bad?" snapped my father.

"How'd you know where I was?"

"In the first place," he said,

"your mother caught right on that Scanny was lying when he said you were studying over at his house, because in your excitement you kids overlooked the fact that tomorrow's Thanksgiving and there's no school to study for. She sent me over there, I broke Scanny down, and he showed me where this room was you'd followed this fellow Petersen to earlier in the day.

"I broke in, looked it over, and found a couple of those newspaper items about this old man Gregory that he'd taken the trouble to mark off and clip out. I didn't like the looks of that to begin with, and your friend Scanny had already mentioned something about a glass eye. Luckily they gave the recluse's address—which was what had put Petersen onto him, too—and when eleven-thirty came and no sign of

you, I rustled up a car and chase out there fast."

We stopped off at Headquarte first, so he could make out t report, and he had me meet son guy with white hair who was t boss, I guess. He clapped my shou der right where it hurt most fro all those falls I'd had, but I didn't let him see that. I saw my fath wasn't going to say anything hir self, so I piped up: "The whole ca is my father's! Now is he going get re-instituted?"

I saw them wink at each othe and then the man with white ha laughed and said, "I think I c promise that." Then he looked me and added, "You think a lot your father, don't you?"

I stood up straight as anythin and stuck my chin out and sai "He's the best damn dick in town



CD

John Dickson Carr

The Wrong Problem

On April 19, 1963, at the 17th Annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner, Hotel Astor, New York City, and on the 18th Anniversary of Mystery Writers of America, John Dickson Carr was given the highest of all MWA awards—he became the fifth Grand Master. The other four Grand Masters are Vincent Starrett, Rex Stout, Ellery Queen, and Erle Stanley Gardner . . . and by way of celebrating the honor which Mr. Carr so richly deserves, we now give you one of his most interesting short stories about detective Dr. Gideon Fell.

AT THE DETECTIVES' CLUB IT IS still told how Dr. Fell went into the valley in Somerset at evening and of the man with whom he talked in the twilight by the lake, and of murder that came as though from the lake itself. The truth about the crime has long been known, but one question must always be asked at the end of it. The village of Grayling Dene lay a mile away towards the sunset. And the rear windows of the house looked towards it. This was a long, baled house of red brick, lying in a hollow of the shaggy hills, and its bricks had darkened like an old painting. No lights showed inside, though the lawns were in good order and the hedges trimmed. Behind the house there was a long dam of water in the sunset, for the ornamental lake—some fifty yards across—stretched almost to the windows. In the middle of the lake, on

an artificial island, stood a summer-house. A faint breeze had begun to stir, despite the heat, and the valley was alive with a conference of leaves.

The last light showed that all the windows of the house, except one, had little lozenge-shaped panes. The one exception was a window high up in a gable, the highest in the house, looking out over the road to Grayling Dene. It was barred.

Dusk had almost become darkness when two men came down over the crest of the hill. One was large and lean. The other, who wore a shovel-hat, was large and immensely stout, and he loomed even more vast against the skyline by reason of the great dark cloak billowing out behind him. Even at that distance you might hear the chuckles that animated his several chins and ran down the ridges of his waistcoat. The two travellers were engaged

(as usual) in a violent argument. At intervals the larger one would stop and hold forth oratorically for some minutes, flourishing his cane. But, as they came down past the lake and the blind house, both of them stopped.

"There's an example," said Superintendent Hadley. "Say what you like, it's a bit too lonely for me. Give me the town—"

"We are not alone," said Dr. Fell.

The whole place had seemed so deserted that Hadley felt a slight start when he saw a man standing at the edge of the lake. Against the reddish glow on the water they could make out that it was a small man in neat dark clothes and a white linen hat. He seemed to be stooping forward, peering out across the water. The wind went rustling again, and the man turned round.

"I don't see any swans," he said. "Can you see any swans?" The quiet water was empty.

"No," said Dr. Fell, with the same gravity. "Should there be any?"

"There should be one," answered the little man, nodding. "Dead. With blood on its neck. Floating there."

"Killed?" asked Dr. Fell, after a pause. He has said afterwards that it seemed a foolish thing to say; but that it seemed appropriate to that time between the lights of the day and the brain.

"Oh, yes," replied the little man, nodding again. "Killed, like others

—human beings. Eye, ear and throat. Or perhaps I should say each eye and throat, to get them in order."

Hadley spoke with some sharness.

"I hope we're not trespassing. We knew the land was enclosed, of course, but they told us that the owners were away and wouldn't mind if we took a short cut. Fedon't you think we'd better—"

"I beg your pardon," said the little man, in a voice of such composure that Hadley turned round again. From what they could see in the gloom, he had a good face, a quiet face, somewhat ascetic face and he was smiling. "I beg your pardon," he repeated in a curious apologetic tone. "I should not have said that. You see, I have been following it. I have been trying to find the real answer for 30 years. As for the trespassing myself, I do not own this land, although I live here once. There is, or used to be, a bench here somewhere. Can I detain you for a little while?"

Hadley never quite realised afterwards how it came about. But such was the spell of the hour, or of the place, or the sincere, serious little man in the white linen hat, that seemed no time at all before the little man was sitting on a rusty iron chair beside the darkening lake, speaking as though to his finger tips.

"I am Joseph Lessing," he said in the same apologetic tone. "You have not heard of me, I do

Suppose you will have heard of my stepfather. But at one time he was rather famous as an eye, ear and throat specialist. Dr. Harvey Lessing, his name was.

"In those days we—I mean the family—always came down here to spend our summer holidays. It is rather difficult to make biographical details clear. Perhaps I had better do it with dates: as though the matter were really important, like a history book. There were four children. Three of them were Dr. Lessing's children by his first wife, who died in 1899. I was the stepson. He married my mother when I was 17, in 1901. I regret to say that she died three years later. Dr. Lessing was a kindly man, but he was very unfortunate in the choice of his wives."

The little man appeared to be sighing sadly.

"We were an ordinary, contented and happy group, in spite of Brownrigg's cynicism. Brownrigg was the best. Eye, ear and throat pursued: he was a dentist. I think he is dead now. He was a stout man, sighing a good deal, and his face had a shine like pale butter. He was an athlete run to seed; he used to boast that he could draw teeth with his fingers. By the way, he was very fond of walnuts. I always seem to remember him sitting between two silver candlesticks at the table, sighing, with a heap of shells in front of him and a little sharp nut-pick in his hand.

"Harvey Junior was the next. They were right to call him Junior; he was of the striding sort, brisk and high-coloured and likeable. He never sat down in a chair without first turning it the wrong way round. He always said 'Ho, my lads!' when he came into a room, and he never went out of it without leaving the door open so that he could come back in again. Above everything, he was nearly always on the water. We had a skiff and a punt for our little lake—would you believe that it is ten feet deep? Junior always dressed for the part as solemnly as though he had been on the Thames, wearing a red-and-white striped blazer and a straw hat of the sort that used to be called a boater. I say he was nearly always on the water: but not, of course, after tea. That was when Dr. Lessing went to take his afternoon nap in the summer-house."

The summer-house, in its sheath of vines, was almost invisible now. But they all looked at it, very suggestive in the middle of the lake.

"The third child was the girl, Martha. She was almost my own age, and I was very fond of her."

Joseph Lessing pressed his hands together.

"I am not going to introduce an unnecessary love story, gentlemen," he said. "As a matter of fact, Martha was engaged to a young man who had a commission in a line regiment, and she was expecting him down here any day when—the

things happened. Arthur Somers, his name was. I knew him well; I was his confidant in the family.

"I want to emphasise what a hot, pleasant summer it was. The place looked then much as it does now, except that I think it was greener then. I was glad to get away from the city. In accordance with Dr. Lessing's passion for 'useful employment,' I had been put to work in the optical department of a jeweller's. I was always skilful with my hands. I dare say I was a spindly, snappish, suspicious lad, but they were all very good to me after my mother died: except butter-faced Brownrigg, perhaps. But for me that summer centers round Martha, with her brown hair piled up on the top of her head, in a white dress with puffed shoulders, playing croquet on a green lawn and laughing. I told you it was a long while ago.

"On the afternoon of the fifteenth of August we had all intended to be out. Even Brownrigg had intended to go out after a sort of lunch-tea that we had at two o'clock in the afternoon. Look to your right, gentlemen. You see that bow window in the middle of the house, overhanging the lake? There was where the table was set.

"Dr. Lessing was the first to leave the table. He was going out early for his nap in the summer-house. It was a very hot afternoon, as drowsy as the sound of a lawnmower. The sun baked the old bricks and made a flat blaze on the

water. Junior had knocked together a sort of miniature landing-stage at the side of the lake—it was just about where we are sitting now—and the punt and the rowing-boat were lying there.

"From the open windows we could all see Dr. Lessing going down to the landing-stage with the sun on his bald spot. He had a pillow in one hand and a book in the other. He took the rowing-boat; he could never manage the punt properly and it irritated a man of his dignity to try.

"Martha was the next to leave. She laughed and ran away, as she always did. Then Junior said 'Cheerio, chaps'—or whatever the expression was then—and strode out leaving the door open. I went shortly afterwards. Junior had asked Brownrigg whether he intended to go out, and Brownrigg had said yes. But he remained, being lazy, with a pile of walnut shells in front of him. Though he moved back from the table to get out of the glare he lounged there all afternoon in view of the lake.

"Of course, what Brownrigg said or thought might not have been important. But it happened that a gardener named Robinson had taken it into his head to trim some hedges on this side of the house. He had a full view of the lake. An all that afternoon nothing stirred. The summer-house, as you can see, has two doors: one facing toward the house, the other in the opposit

irection. These openings were closed by sun-blinds, striped red and white like Junior's blazer, so that you could not see inside. But all the afternoon the summer-house remained dead, showing up against the fiery water and that clump of trees at the far side of the lake. No boat put out. No one went in to swim. There was not so much as a ripple, any more than might have been caused by the swans (we had two of them), or by the spring that fed the lake.

"By six o'clock we were all back in the house. When there began to be a few shadows, I think something in the *emptiness* of the afternoon alarmed us. Dr. Lessing should have been there, demanding something. He was not there. We halloo'd for him, but he did not answer. The swing boat remained tied up by the summer-house. Then Brown-ing, in his cool fetch-and-run fashion, told me to go out and take up the old party. I pointed out that there was only the punt, and that I was a rotten hand at punting, and that whenever I tried

I only went round in circles or upset the boat. But Junior said, 'Come-along-old-chap-you-shall-improve-your-punting-I'll-give-you-a-hand.'

"I have never forgotten how long took us to get out of there while staggered at the punt-pole, and Junior lent a hand.

"Dr. Lessing lay easily on his left side, almost on his stomach, on a

long wicker settee. His face was very nearly into the pillow, so that you could not see much except a wisp of sandy side-whisker. His right hand hung down to the floor, the fingers trailing into the pages of '*Three Men in a Boat*'.

"We first noticed that there seemed to be some—that is, something that had come out of his ear. More we did not know, except that he was dead, and in fact the weapon has never been found. He died in his sleep. The doctor later told us that the wound had been made by some round sharp-pointed instrument, thicker than a hat-pin, but not so thick as a lead-pencil, which had been driven through the right ear into the brain."

Joseph Lessing paused. A mighty swish of wind uprose in the trees beyond the lake, and their tops ruffled under clear starlight. The little man sat nodding to himself in the iron chair. They could see his white hat move.

"Yes?" prompted Dr. Fell in an almost casual tone. Dr. Fell was sitting back, a great bandit-shape in cloak and shovel-hat. He seemed to be blinking curiously at Lessing over his eyeglasses. "And whom did they suspect?"

"They suspected me," said the little man.

"You see," he went on, in the same apologetic tone, "I was the only one in the group who could swim. It was my one accomplishment. It is too dark to show you

now but I won a little medal by it, and I have kept it on my watch-chain ever since I received it as a boy."

"But you said," cried Hadley, "that nobody . . ."

"I will explain," said the other, "if you do not interrupt me. Of course, the police believed that the motive must have been money. Dr. Lessing was a wealthy man, and his money was divided almost equally among us. I told you he was always very good to me.

"First they tried to find out where every one had been in the afternoon. Brownrigg had been sitting, or said he had been sitting, in the dining-room. But there was the gardner to prove that not he or any one else had gone out on the lake. Martha (it was foolish, of course, but they investigated even Martha) had been with a friend of hers—I forgot her name now—who came for her in the phaeton and took her away to play croquet. Junior had no alibi, since he had been for a country walk. But," said Lessing, quite simply, "everybody knew *he* would never do a thing like that. I was the changeling, or perhaps I mean ugly duckling, and I admit I was an unpleasant, sarcastic lad.

"This is how Inspector Deering thought I had committed the murder. First, he thought, I had made sure everybody would be away from the house that afternoon. Thus, later, when the crime was dis-

covered, it would be assumed by everyone that the murderer had simply gone out in the punt and come back again. Everybody knew that I could not possibly manage a punt alone. You see?"

"Next, the inspector thought, had come down to the clump of trees across the lake, in line with the summer-house and the dining-room windows. It is shallow there, and there are reeds. He thought that had taken off my clothes over my bathing-suit. He thought that had crept into the water under cover of the reeds, and that I had simply swum out to the summer-house under water.

"Twenty odd yards under water I admit, are not much to a good swimmer. They thought that Brownrigg could not see me come up out of the water, because the thickness of the summer-house was between. Robinson had a full view of the lake, but he could not see that one part at the back of the summer-house. Nor, on the other hand, could I see them. The thought that I had crawled under the sun-blind with the weapon in the breast of my bathing-suit. And the wetness I might have left would soon be dried by the intense heat. That I think, was how they believed I had killed the old man who befriended me."

The little man's voice grew petulant and dazed.

"I told them I did not do it," I said with a hopeful air. "Over at

ver again I told them I did not o it. But I do not think they believed me. That is why for all these ears I have wondered—

“It was Brownrigg’s idea. They ad me before a sort of family ouncil in the library, as though I ad stolen jam. Martha was weeping, but I think she was weeping ith plain fear. She never stood up well in a crisis, Martha didn’t; she urned pettish and even looked after. All the same, it is not pleasant o think of a murderer coming up o you as you doze in the afternoon eat. Junior, the good fellow, at-empted to take my side and call for air play; but I could see the idea in is face. Brownrigg presided, silkily.

“‘We have either got to believe ou killed him,’ Brownrigg said, ‘or believe in the supernatural. Is the ake haunted? No; I think we may afely discard that.’ He pointed his nger at me. ‘You damned young nake, you are lazy and wanted that noney.’

“But, you see, I had one very trong hold over them—and I used t. I admit it was unscrupulous, but was trying to demonstrate my ncence and we are told that the levil must be fought with fire. At nention of this hold, even Brownrigg’s jowls shook. Brownrigg was

dentist, Harvey was studying nedicine. What hold? That is the whole point. Nevertheless, it was ot what the family thought I had o fear: it was what Inspector Deering thought.

“They did not arrest me yet, because there was not enough evi-dence, but every night I feared it would come the next day. Those days after the funeral were too warm; and suspicion acted like woollen underwear under the heat. Martha’s tantrums got on even Junior’s nerves. Once I thought Brownrigg was going to hit her. She very badly needed her fiancé, Arthur Somers; but, though he wrote that he might be there any day, he still could not get leave of absence from his colonel.

“And then the lake got more food.

“Look at the house, gentlemen. I wonder if the light is strong enough for you to see it from here? Look at the house—the highest window there—under the gable. You see?”

There was a pause, filled with the tumult of the leaves.

“It’s got bars,” said Hadley.

“Yes,” assented the little man. “I must describe the room. It is a little square room. It has one door and one window. At the time I speak of, there was no furniture at all in it. The furniture had been taken out some years before, because it was rather a special kind of furniture. Since then it had been locked up. The key was kept in a box in Dr. Lessing’s room; but, of course, nobody ever went up there. One of Dr. Lessing’s wives had died there in a certain condition. I told you he had bad luck with his wives. They had not even dared to have a glass window.”

Sharply, the little man struck a match. The brief flame seemed to bring his face up towards them out of the dark. They saw that he had a pipe in his left hand. But the flame showed little except the gentle upward turn of his eyes, and the fact that his whitish hair (of such coarse texture that it seemed whitewashed) was worn rather long.

"On the afternoon of the twenty-second of August, we had an unexpected visit from the family solicitor. There was no one to receive him except myself. Brownrigg had locked himself up in his room at the front with a bottle of whisky; he was drunk or said he was drunk. Junior was out. We had been trying to occupy our minds for the past week, but Junior could not have his boating or I my workshop; this was thought not decent. I believe it was thought that the most decent thing was to get drunk. For some days Martha had been ailing. She was not ill enough to go to bed, but she was lying on a long chair in her bedroom.

"I looked into the room just before I went downstairs to see the solicitor. The room was muffled up with shutters and velvet curtains, as all the rooms decently were. You may imagine that it was very hot in there. Martha was lying back in the chair with a smelling-bottle, and there was a white-globed lamp burning on a little round table beside her. I remember that her white dress looked starchy; her

hair was piled up on top of her head and she wore a little gold watch on her breast. Also, her eye lids were so puffed that they seemed almost oriental. When I asked her how she was, she began to cry and concluded by throwing a book at me.

"So I went on downstairs. I was talking to the solicitor when it took place. We were in the library, which is at the front of the house, and in consequence we could not hear distinctly. But we heard something. That was why we went upstairs—and even the solicitor ran. Martha was not in her own bedroom. We found out where she was from the fact that the door to the garret-stairs was open.

"It was even more intolerably hot up under the roof. The door to the barred room stood half-way open. Just outside stood a housemaid (her name, I think, was Jane Dawson) leaning against the jamb and shaking like the ribbons on her cap. All sound had dried up in her throat, but she pointed inside.

"I told you it was a little, bare, dirty brown room. The low sun made a blaze through the window, and made shadows of the bars across Martha's white dress. Martha lay nearly in the middle of the room, with her heel twisted under her as though she had turned round before she fell. I lifted her up and tried to talk to her; but a rounded sharp-pointed thing, somewhat thicker than a hatpin, had been driven

rough the right eye into the brain. "Yet there was nobody else in the room.

"The maid told a straight story. She had seen Martha come out of Mr. Lessing's bedroom downstairs. Martha was running, running as well as she could in those skirts; once she stumbled, and the maid thought that she was sobbing. Jane Dawson said that Martha made for the garret door as though the devil were after her. Jane Dawson, wishing anything rather than to be alone in the dark hall, followed her. She saw Martha come up here and unlock the door of the little brown room. When Martha ran inside, the maid thought that she did not tempt to close the door; but that appeared to swing shut after her. You see?

"Whatever had frightened Martha, Jane Dawson did not dare follow her in—for a few seconds, at least, and afterwards it was too late. The maid could never afterwards describe exactly the sort of sound Martha made. It was something that startled the birds out of the trees and set the swans flapping on the lake. But the maid presently went straight enough to push the door with one finger and peep round the edge.

"Except for Martha, the room was empty.

"Hence the three of us now looked at each other. The maid's story was not to be shaken in any way, and we all knew she was a

truthful witness. Even the police did not doubt her. She said she had seen Martha go into that room, but that she had seen nobody come out of it. She never took her eyes off the door—it was not likely that she would. But when she peeped in to see what had happened, there was nobody except Martha in the room. That was easily established, because there was no place where any one could have been. Could she have been blinded by the light? No. Could any one have slipped past her? No. She almost shook her hair loose by her vehemence on this point.

"The window, I need scarcely tell you, was inaccessible. Its bars were firmly set, no farther apart than the breadth of your hand, and in any case the window could not have been reached. There was no way out of the room except the door or the window; and no—what is the word I want?—no mechanical device in it. Our friend Inspector Deering made certain of that. One thing I suppose I should mention. Despite the condition of the walls and ceiling, the floor of the room was swept clean. Martha's white dress with the puffed shoulders had scarcely any dirt when she lay there; it was as white as her face.

"This murder was incredible. I do not mean merely that it was incredible with regard to its physical circumstances, but also that there was Martha dead—on a holiday. Possibly she seemed all the more

dead because we had never known her well when she was alive. She was (to me, at least) a laugh, a few coquetties, a pair of brown eyes. You felt her absence more than you would have felt that of a more vital person. And—on a holiday with that warm sun, and the tennis-net ready to be put up.

"That evening I walked with Junior here in the dusk by the lake. He was trying to express some of this. He appeared dazed. He did not know why Martha had gone up to that little brown room, and he kept endlessly asking why. He could not even seem to accustom himself to the idea that our holidays were interrupted, much less interrupted by the murders of his father and his sister.

"There was a reddish light on the lake; the trees stood up against it like black lace, and we were walking near that clump by the reeds. The thing I remember most vividly is Junior's face. He had his hat on the back of his head, as he usually did. He was staring down past the reeds, where the water lapped faintly, as though the lake itself were the evil genius and kept its secret. When he spoke I hardly recognised his voice.

"'God,' he said, 'but it's in the air!'

"There was something white floating by the reeds, very slowly turning round, with a snaky discoloured talon coming out from it along the water, the talon was the head of a swan, and the swan was dead of a

gash across the neck, that had ve
nearly severed it.

"We fished it out with a boa hook," explained the little man though with an afterthought. And then he was silent.

On the long iron bench Dr. Fell cape shifted a little; Hadley could hear him wheezing with quiet anger like a boiling kettle.

"I thought so," rumbled Dr. Fell. He added more sharply: "Look here, this tomfoolery has got to stop."

"I beg your pardon?" said Joseph Lessing, evidently startled.

"With your kind permission, said Dr. Fell, and Hadley has lately said that he was never more glad to see that cane flourished or hear the common-sense voice grow fiery with controversy: "with your kind permission, I should like to ask you a question. Will you swear to me before anything you hold sacred (if you have anything, which I rather doubt) that you do not know the real answer?"

"Yes," replied the other seriously and nodded.

For a little space, Dr. Fell was silent. Then he spoke argumentatively. "I will ask you another question, then. Did you ever shoot an arrow into the air?"

Hadley turned round. "I hear the call of mumbo-jumbo," said Hadley with grim feeling. "Hold on, now. You don't think that girl was killed by somebody shooting an arrow into the air, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Fell in a mor

neditative tone. He looked at Lessing. "I mean it figuratively—like the boy in the verse. Did you ever throw a stone when you were a boy? Did you ever throw a stone, not to hit anything, but for the sheer joy of firing it? Did you ever climb trees? Did you ever like to play pirate and dress up and wave a word? I don't think so. That's why you live in a dreary, rarefied light; that's why you dislike romance and sentiment and good whisky and all the noblest things of this world; and that is also why you do not see the unseasonableness of several things in his case.

"To begin with, birds do not commonly rise up in a great cloud from the vines because some one cries out. With the hopping and always whooping Junior about the premises, should imagine the birds were used to it. Still less do swans leap up out of the water and flap their wings because of a cry from far away; swans are not so sensitive. But did you ever see a boy throw a stone at a wall? Did you ever see a boy throw a stone at the water? Birds and swans would have been outraged only if something had struck both the wall and the water: something, in short, which fell from that barred window.

"Now, frightened women do not in their terror rush up to a garret, specially a garret with such associations. They go downstairs, where there is protection. Martha Lessing was not frightened. She went up to

that room for some purpose. What purpose? She could not have been going to get anything, for there was nothing in the room to be got. What could have been on her mind? The only thing we know to have been on her mind was a frantic wish for her fiancé to get there. She had been expecting him for weeks. It is a singular thing about that room: but its window is the highest in the house, and commands the only good clear view of the road to the village.

"Now suppose some one had told her that he thought, he rather *thought*, he had glimpsed Arthur Somers coming up the road from the village. It was a long way off, of course; and the some one admitted he might have been mistaken in thinking so. . . .

"H'm, yes. The trap was all set, you see. Martha Lessing waited only long enough to get the key out of the box in her father's room, and she sobbed with relief. But, when she got to the room, there was a strong sun pouring through the bars straight into her face: and the road to the village is a long way off. That, I believe, was the trap. For on the window-ledge of that room (which nobody ever used, and which some one had swept so that there should be no footprints) this some one conveniently placed a pair of—eh, Hadley?"

"Field-glasses," said Hadley, and got up in the gloom.

"Still," argued Dr. Fell, wheezing argumentatively, "there would be

one nuisance. Take a pair of field-glasses, and try to use them in a window where the bars are set more closely than the breadth of your hand. The bars get in the way: wherever you turn you bump into them; they confuse sight and irritate you; and, in addition, there is a strong sun to complicate matters. In your impatience, I think you would turn the glasses sideways and pass them out through the bars. Then, holding them firmly against one bar with your hands through the bars on either side, you would look through the eyepieces.

"But," said Dr. Fell, with a ferocious geniality, "those were no ordinary glasses. Martha Lessing had noticed before that the lenses were blurred. Now that they were in position, she tried to adjust the focus by turning the little wheel in the middle. And as she turned the wheel, like the trigger of a pistol it released the spring mechanism and a sharp steel point shot out from the right-hand lens into her eye. She dropped the glasses, which were outside the window. The weight of them tore the point from her eye; and it was this object, falling, which gashed and broke the neck of the swan just before it disappeared into the water below."

He paused. He had taken out a cigar, but he did not light it.

"Busy solicitors do not usually come to a house 'unexpectedly.' They are summoned. Brownrigg was drunk and Junior absent; there was

no one at the back of the house to see the glasses fall. For this time the murderer had to have a respectable alibi. Young Martha, the only one who could have been gulled into such a trap, had to be sacrificed— to avert the arrest which had been threatening some one ever since the police found out how Dr. Lessing really had been murdered.

"There was only one man who admittedly did speak with Martha Lessing only a few minutes before she was murdered. There was only one man who was employed as optician at a jeweller's, and admits he had his 'workshop' here. There was only one man skilful enough with his hands—" Dr. Fell paused, wheezing, and turned to Lessing. "I wonder they didn't arrest you."

"They did," said the little man nodding. "You see, I was released from Broadmoor only a month ago."

There was a sudden rasp and crackle as he struck another match.

"You—" bellowed Hadley, and stopped. "So it was your mother who died in that room? Then what the hell do you mean by keeping us here with this pack of nightmares?"

"No," said the other peevishly. "You do not understand. I never wanted to know who killed Dr. Lessing or poor Martha. You have got hold of the wrong problem. And yet I tried to tell you what the problem was."

"You see, it was not *my* mother who died mad. It was theirs—

Brownrigg's and Harvey's and Martha's. That was why they were so desperately anxious to think I was guilty, for they could not face the alternative. Didn't I tell you I had hold over them, a hold that made even Brownrigg shake, and that I sed it? Do you think they wouldn't have had me clapped into gaol straightaway if it had been *my* mother who was mad? Eh?

"Of course," he explained apologetically, "at the trial they had to swear it was my mother who was mad; for I threatened to tell the truth in open court if they didn't. Otherwise I should have been hanged, you see. Only Brownrigg and Junior were left. Brownrigg was a dentist, Junior was to be a doctor,

and if it had been known—But that is not the point. That is not the problem. Their mother was mad, but they were harmless. I killed Dr. Lessing. I killed Martha. Yes, I am quite sane. Why did I do it, all those years ago? Why? Is there no rational pattern in the scheme of things, and no answer to the bedevilled of the earth?"

The match curled to a red ember, winked and went out. Clearest of all they remembered the coarse hair that was like whitewash on the black, the eyes, and the curiously suggestive hands. Then Joseph Lessing got up from the chair. The last they saw of him was his white hat bobbing and flickering across the lawn under the blowing trees.



Michael Gilbert

Snap Shot

The biggest news event of the century—the Prime Minister greeting Paraman while 45 cameramen snapped the shot . . . It looked like an impossible case to solve—until Commander Elfe consulted a mathematician and magician.

THE REALLY TERRIFYING THING about Lampeter was that he was so ordinary. Neither large nor small, neither intellectual nor brutal. Running decently to fat, as a man may at forty-five. Wearing glasses for reading. The only really surprising thing about him was that he was still a bachelor. You would have thought some woman would have picked him up and popped him in her pocket long ago.

And whatever dragons lived inside his head, whatever dread familiar stood at his elbow whispering commands that could not be disobeyed, whatever worlds he created and whatever worlds he destroyed, they left no mark at all upon his placid face. No single ripple distorted the surface of the dark lake to give warning of the creature that laired in the depths.

How Mr. Robinson and Mr. Smith found out the truth about Lampeter is a mystery. The Robinsons and the Smiths know everything. They live by knowledge. Almost the first time they saw him, Mr. Robinson (who spoke five lan-

guages) said to Mr. Smith in one of them, "Here is our man." And Mr. Smith said, "I believe you are right."

"There's going to be an all-time record scrum," said "Tabs" Milligan. "Every paper in the land here."

"Of course there's a scrum," said "Polly" Flinders. He was first photographer for the *Trumpet*, and conscious of the prestige this conferred. "It's not an itsy-bitsy little film star. Tabs. It's Paraman. He is news."

"There's old Cummins, lookin like a constipated crab. Clever with outdoor work, though. Lots of faces I don't recognize."

"If they don't get a move on it going to be too dark to take proper photographs," said Polly. "And this is one we don't want to miss, isn't it? Prime Minister of England shaking hands with Paraman. Think that!"

"It is a sign of the new age," said a small, dark man with a beard.

"It's a bloody miracle," said Polly. "And, boy, here she comes."

The four-engined airliner swung in a majestic curve across the airport, headed into the wind, centered itself on some invisible mark, and came down as firm and straight as if it had been ruled on paper. The pilot picked up the eighty tons of metal and laid it down on the runway as lightly as a feather.

Lines of men in blue began running.

"They've got as many police here as the Coronation and May Day put together," panted Milligan. He was trotting forward with the other newspapermen.

It was superbly organized.

One minute the landing strip was empty. The next minute there was a thin but unbroken blue line round the airliner, fifty yards from it. Unbroken on three sides. Through the fourth, in three well-regimented platoons, each with its roped approach way, came the Deputation of Welcome (morning dress and smiles), the Security Detachment (bowler hats and frowns) and the forty or fifty photographers, in every variety of dress and with no time at all to bother what they looked like.

Landing steps were quickly run out.

But someone had miscalculated. Insufficient frontage had been allowed for the photographers to form a single line. Normally this might not have mattered a great deal, but this was by no means a normal occasion.

The line shifted and spread. Two

policemen tried to hold back the ends. They might as well have tried to grasp quicksilver. The policemen were evaded, their protests unheeded, as the line elongated, then swept round in a half circle, until the right-hand end rested almost under the shadow of the great airplane.

Down the gangway walked two large men, in brown coats and black hats. They saw the stretching line of photographers, and frowned. But events were moving too fast for them, too.

For, behind them at that moment, appeared the world-famous figure photographed a hundred thousand times, but until then never seen in the flesh in the Western world. The small beard, the face, almost startlingly brown, the graying hair, the smiling tired eyes. The eyes that had seen everything and forgotten nothing.

The battery of newsreel cameras on the parked vans started to purr in grateful unison. The flashlights of the photographers winked almost simultaneously.

The Prime Minister stepped forward with an impulsive gesture of boyish charm (rehearsed behind locked doors until it had achieved a polished spontaneity), and thrust out his hand. Paraman grasped it, and said something with a broad smile.

The Prime Minister looked round for the interpreter—and in that very moment it happened.

Paraman pulled his hand away

and laid it over his heart. A look of wonder came into his eyes. It was as though a question, often asked, had surprisingly been answered.

Then his knees folded under him and he dropped, quietly and without fuss, onto his face on the concrete runway.

"For a moment," said the Prime Minister, "I thought he'd had a heart attack. That would have been bad enough. Then I saw the blood on his hand."

"Yes, sir," said Commander Elfe.

"Even then I couldn't grasp it. Murder!"

"Extraordinary timing," agreed the Commander. His own head was loose on his shoulders at that moment, and none knew it better than he. "We do appreciate the importance of clearing this up quickly."

They were standing in the magnificent Privy Council room in Whitehall. The Prime Minister moved over to the bow window and stared across at the waters of St. James's Park.

He had, in fact, and quite cold-bloodedly, considered whether or not he should sack the head of the Special Branch, and had come to the conclusion that for the time being he had better support him.

"I don't want to exaggerate this," he said, "nor, God knows, to minimize it. I don't think it will mean war. Their radio's been white hot, of course, but the world's outgrown the Sarajevo days. On the other

hand, if we don't catch the man, and prove that he did it, and why he did it, and clear the whole thing up, why, it'll leave a legacy of distrust for ten years—in just that part of the world where we most need trust."

He came back into the room. The Commander was not quite certain whether the Prime Minister added, "And it will certainly lose us the next election." Spoken or not, the thought was there.

"I'm sure you'll do your best," the Prime Minister concluded, shaking hands almost formally with Commander Elfe.

"Like a doctor," said the Commander to Superintendent Bliss, "who has just pronounced sentence of death with a hope, a very faint hope, of reprieve. How are you getting on with those bloody photographers?"

"There are exactly forty-five of them," said the Superintendent, "and they are all precisely what they said they were, if you follow me."

"Yes."

"About two-thirds of them were from newspapers. Some old and tried hands. Some new boys. In every case the newspaper concerned says they were absolutely reliable."

"Of course."

"The other third were from private news agencies, large and small. But since there's nothing to stop anyone forming a news agency—it only needs a man, a boy, and a back office near Fleet Street—"

"Quite so," said Elfe. "I suppose

we're concentrating on the smaller agencies. Was it a camera gun?"

"I think so. It would be the obvious way, wouldn't it?"

"Have the experts made anything out of the weapon you found on the runway?"

"It's a small air pistol of a very powerful new type. The pressure's too high for ordinary loading methods. It's fired with a compressed air capsule which, incidentally, gives it a higher muzzle velocity than a .38."

"And therefore higher accuracy."

"Yes. A real murder weapon. Two other points about it. It's got no sighting apparatus of any sort, and the exterior of the muzzle is screw-threaded an inch from the end."

"That sounds conclusive to me," said Elfe. "It was specially made to screw into the socket of a camera. And it was calibrated to the camera-sights. Right? When the cross wire of the camera view finder was over the victim's heart, the murderer simply pressed the button. All right. You've got all the cameras. It shouldn't be difficult to see which one's been tampered with."

"It shouldn't," agreed the Superintendent. "But it is. Most of the cameras are made to be taken apart, and all of them, except the very smallest, could have been used to hide a gun. But none of them has actually got a socket that fits the screw threads on the gun we found. Of course, we're not dealing with fools. It would have been quite easy

to make the thing in two parts, with an outer metal bush that fits into the camera and is screw-threaded in the center to take the gun."

"I'm afraid that's right, too." Elfe thought it out slowly. His mind was not working with its usual calm precision, and that wasn't only because he had been up for two nights. For the first time he was beginning to weigh the odds against them. "I take it that as soon as he'd fired, the assassin would unscrew gun and bush—quite a natural sort of gesture—if anyone did spare him a second glance they'd think he was removing an exposed plate or something. Drops the gun down his trouser leg and onto the ground. Puts the bush in his pocket. Just an ordinary small piece of metal. By the way, they were searched pretty thoroughly, weren't they? Was anything of the sort found?"

"No. But by that time they'd crossed two hundred yards of grass field, and been standing about for half an hour. It could easily have been trodden into the ground. Or dropped down a drain."

"All the same, we'd better search for it," said Elfe. "And find it. We can't hold forty-five photographers on suspicion, even in a case like this."

There was a great deal to do, but, unfortunately for Elfe's peace of mind, very little that he could do himself.

There were forty-five men, with forty-five backgrounds that needed

checking. There were forty-five cameras and one gun that needed a laboratory going-over; and thirty editors and fifteen agencies who had to be told why they couldn't have the photographs their men had taken of the biggest news event of the century.

("As long as *no one* gets a photograph, I don't mind," said the editor of the largest paper of all, quite genially. "But you release a single one to anyone ahead of anyone else and you'll raise a head of steam which will blow you out of Scotland Yard.")

Much of this could be attended to by the regular organization. But there were other matters, more subtle, less objective, which could be attended to only by Elfe's own department. The motives behind the killing. Known terrorist organizations. Pressure groups. The dim politics of the half world of secret agents, official and unofficial, of military attachés who had never been in any army and of trade delegates who dealt with anything but trade.

It was not at all plain, for example, to whose advantage the killing of Paraman, at such a time and place, might have been. To his successors? Yet it seemed clear from their reactions that it had come as a bigger surprise to them than to anyone else. To those who wished to increase the tension between England and Paraman's country, and might profit from such tension? Elfe was not a great believer in the figure of

the world financier who manufactures wars and revolutions for his own enrichment. Most of the big financiers he knew were timid men who liked a thirty per cent margin of security for their money.

The really frightening thought was that the killing was probably quite illogical. There were at least three groups in England who would kill merely for killing's sake. Imaginary grievances, sterile causes, which were rooted in terror and flourished in the occasional sensational stroke.

"When we get to the bottom of the matter," Elfe said to Bliss, "we shall find that Paraman was killed because his predecessor had someone's aunt flogged in Poland twenty years ago."

"Doesn't matter who it is," said Bliss, "as long as we catch them. Did you see the *Trumpet* headline today?"

"I never read the papers," said Elfe.

Nevertheless, the writing was on the wall. In forty-eight hours at the most the Foreign Secretary was going to be on his feet answering the questions of a critical House; and unless he had some answers to give, public opinion was going to demand a scapegoat. And Commander Elfe had no delusions as to who would be cast for that role.

Early that evening he left his office and walked slowly down Parade Street, into the Park, past the south end of the Palace, and out

into Buckingham Gate. In a lesser figure, his method of progress might almost have been described as furtive. He paused in front of the modest building which houses the Director of Public Prosecutions, and then, almost as if it were an afterthought, went inside.

The Commissionaire saluted as Elfe said, "Has Mr. Hughes gone home yet?"

"I don't think so, sir. Shall I tell him you're here?"

"I'll announce myself," said Elfe. He walked up one flight of steps and stopped outside a door marked *Deputy Director*, and underneath that, *Gladwyn Hughes*, and underneath both, *KEEP OUT!*

He opened the door without knocking and a white-faced black-jowled man, who was plotting something on a large sheet of graph paper pinned to the table, roared, "Get out," and then, looking up, "Come in. I thought it was that fool Langley. You don't happen to know a function of seven that combines with itself to produce either nought or infinity?"

"Not being a mathematician or a magician, no."

Gladwyn Hughes was both a mathematician and a magician. He completed the *Times* crossword puzzle every morning between Woking and Surbiton, had played contract bridge for England, and was capable of thinking in three different planes simultaneously. He had come to the D.P.P.'s office via the Legal branch

of Scotland Yard and would one day head the C.I.D.

"You're worried about the Para-man case?"

"I'd like your help," said Elfe.

"Of course. Anything I can do. What do you want?"

Elfe sat down in the shabby arm-chair. It was very comfortable.

"What we really need," he said, "is a fresh mind on the problem."

"Do my best," said Hughes. "I've read about it, of course. Tell it from beginning to end. It'll help you as well as me."

The long hand had gone right round the old-fashioned clock on the mantelshelf before Elfe had finished.

"It's a stinker," said Hughes. "If we were a totalitarian country we'd have all those cameramen in cells now, giving them Number One treatment, and the first to break down would be awarded the starring role in the forthcoming trial, and everybody else would be covered with coats of whitewash."

"Except me," said Elfe.

"Well, yes. I expect you'd have been shot already. *Pour encourager les autres.*" Hughes looked curiously at Elfe. As a psychologist, it always interested him to see how his superiors and colleagues reacted under pressure. He thought Elfe was doing quite well. A little tight round the mouth, but plenty in reserve still.

"Could I see the films?"

"Now?" said Elfe. "Yes. I expect so. If I telephone from here they

could have them ready by the time we get there."

In the basement of Scotland Yard there is a tiny private cinema, at which very odd films are sometimes shown. The two men settled into their seats, and the white fanlight of the projector cut across the darkness.

"This is the longest version," said Elfe. "Unfortunately, the focus is on the Prime Minister and Paraman. You can see the photographers, but they're a bit blurred."

"Again," said Hughes a little later. And still later, "Again." The second time he had a stop watch in his hand. The third time he made notes.

As they came out of the projection room Hughes said to Elfe, "I want to get hold of one of those newsreel cameramen. A reliable one. Can you do that? I've got the glimmering of an idea. If it comes to anything, where can I find you?"

"At my flat," said Elfe. "I don't suppose I shall go to bed."

It was two o'clock in the morning when Hughes arrived. His eye was bright, and he said "No" regretfully to the whiskey that Elfe pushed across. "I've been drinking with an Irishman called Milligan. I survived, but only just. Now, I'm going to strike a bargain with you."

Elfe cocked an eye at him.

"If I give you the idea that leads to the man you want, will you let me stay in on the case until the end?"

Elfe hesitated barely a second, then said, "Yes, of course."

"All right. Then here it is. All you've got to do to locate your chap is to develop *all the films and plates* in their cameras."

"There are about three hundred of them."

"It doesn't matter if there are three thousand. What my cameraman told me—and, remember, they see dozens of receptions every week—was this. The normal drill at an airport is that the photographers are marshalled up, in a sort of column. They're not allowed to dodge all over the place. The ones in front take their shots and then it's an understood thing that they then stand aside and the next lot take theirs—and so on. It works quite well normally, because if you've got a lot of agency boys there, they don't all want the *same* picture. One lot will take the exit from the plane, the next will snap the walk across the tarmac, the next the ceremonial handshake, and so on. You follow me?"

"Yes, but—"

"Wait. Unfortunately, in this case, it didn't work that way. The occasion was unique. Everyone was impatient. Instead of staying put and doing the thing in an orderly way, the photographers behaved like a lot of bobby soxers, dodged the police, and strung out *in a single line* across the runway."

"Yes. The film showed all that, but—"

"Wait again. That meant they all had an equal chance of taking a photograph. And I've no doubt at all that they all did. *Except one.* He couldn't. He had a gun in his camera. Remember?"

Elfe breathed out slowly.

Then he mumbled, "I said it needed a fresh mind. Keep in touch."

At eleven o'clock the next morning the red telephone on Mr. Hughes's desk sounded off and the voice of Elfe said, "Bull's-eye, Gladwyn. It's a Mr. Lampeter. Works for the Multum in Parvo Agency in Shoe Lane. Founded three months ago. Directors Mr. Smith and Mr. Robinson."

"What are you going to do?"

"We shall try some shock treatment," said Elfe. "Stay where I can reach you."

Lampeter was worried. He had done just what he had been told, both at the time and afterward.

"Afterward is important," Mr. Smith had said. "Just behave quite normally. They'll confiscate your camera, of course, but it won't tell them anything. You've got another. Go out and get on with the job."

So, for two days and the beginning of a third, Mr. Lampeter had sat in the backroom office, with the deaf and dumb girl, and had sallied forth to photograph two weddings, a presentation of athletic trophies, and the birth of triplets.

But he wished that they would

get in touch with him. They had told him it would be soon—but three days! And then the incident of that morning. It had upset him.

The dumb girl made a mooing noise to attract his attention and he looked up. The red light was showing above the side door—the one which led by the emergency staircase to the back entrance in Pepys Court.

He jumped to his feet and unlocked the door. Mr. Smith and Mr. Robinson came in, and something in their faces chilled the welcome from Mr. Lampeter's lips.

"What is it?" he said. "What's happened? Is something wrong?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Robinson. "What happened to you this morning?"

"At the wedding?"

"Yes."

"It was all a mistake. A big man bumped into me in the crowd. He apologized. Somehow I lost my wallet. It was found later in the corner of the room. I suppose I must have dropped it there."

"Was there anything in it?"

"Just some money. And my commutation ticket. How did you know about it? Were you there?"

"We were there," said Mr. Smith. He did not think it necessary to explain that Lampeter had not been out of their sight since he left the airport.

"The man who bumped into you. Did you know he was a detective?"

"A detective! Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure. His name is Sergeant Hibley. And he is in the Special Branch."

"But why?"

"I should think it's quite plain," said Mr. Robinson brutally. "They wouldn't pick your pocket for love."

There was silence in the tiny dusty office. The deaf and dumb girl broke it by pushing an envelope into her typewriter and addressing it noisily. She disliked the shape of Mr. Robinson's mouth, and Mr. Smith's eyes frightened her.

"You remember," said Mr. Lam-peter, breathlessly. "You promised that if anything went wrong you would look after me."

"Of course," said Mr. Smith. "We said it and we meant it. The car's outside. Get your hat and coat."

Mr. Robinson wrote on a piece of paper, "We shan't be back today. Lock up when you go," and pushed it in front of the girl who looked at it indifferently. Men, with their comings and goings and self-importance, meant little in her private world.

"The car's outside," said Mr. Smith. He looked at his watch and made a calculation. It was five o'clock on an early summer evening. They had almost four hours of daylight ahead of them. It should be enough.

"I've always wanted to see how you manage this part," said Gladwyn. He sank into the back seat

of the car. "When do we sight them?"

Elfe nodded absently. He was busy with a roll of large scale maps. Beside the driver a young police wireless operator with black eyes and a cheerful, gipsy face twiddled the dial of the set.

"We flushed them ten minutes ago," said Elfe. "Shoe Lane, up Ludgate Hill, along Cannon Street, over London Bridge. New Kent Road. Old Kent Road."

"If you're not following him," said Hughes, "who is?"

"No one, really. That isn't how it works at all. This is the first part of Operation Network." He demonstrated on the map. "There are a limited number of places you *must* go past when you leave London. If he breaks Southeast, I give the code-word and about twenty-five posts are manned—each with a wireless—easy, really . . . Has he got past New Cross, Illingworth?"

"Coming up to it now, sir."

"Right or left?"

There was a moment's pause, then the set crackled. "Left, sir."

"Looks like A.2."

"What happens when he gets out in the open country?"

"You'll see," said Elfe.

The car slid on through the warm summer evening.

"A.2 it is, sir," said the operator. "We're going to air control now."

"Do you mean to say you do it with airplanes?"

"One airplane, way up, to co-

ordinate. The real work is done by helicopters. They are the ideal answer to a car in open country. Keep above a closed car and a bit behind it, and ten to one the people inside don't even know it's there. The real imitation is speed. If the controlling aircraft sees that the helicopter is letting left behind it whistles up another from in front."

"I see," said Hughes. "Have you any idea where those characters are taking Lampeter? Or what they're going to do with him?"

"Bypassing Dartford," said the operator. "On Rochester Road."

Elfe marked the location on his map and said, "I could guess the answer to the second question."

Mr. Robinson was an expert driver, and he drove his car hard. Lampeter sat in the back with Mr. Smith.

Once, as the milestones showed Rochester approaching, he said, "Where are we going?"

"To the coast," said Mr. Smith. "We'll have to hide you until we can get you out of the country."

"I see," said Lampeter. He shivered a little, and Mr. Smith looked down at him curiously. "There's nothing to be frightened of."

"I'm not frightened," said Lampeter. "I had a feeling that I'd been asleep for a long time, and was just waking up."

"Perfect," said Mr. Smith. "We can run off here, I think."

The car threaded a network of

byroads, which degenerated into country lanes. Ahead of them lay the sea. Lampeter could sense it.

"Down here. It doesn't look like much of a track, but it'll take the car."

Suddenly they were out of the close country and on the marsh. A short, straight, sandy track, pointing out like a finger to a tumble-down house and barn.

"Is this where I hide?"

"This is where you stop," agreed Mr. Smith.

The car came to a halt. Mr. Robinson cut the engine and they climbed out.

In the silence they could hear the birds at evensong, the distant complaints of the marsh cattle, and the buzzing of a million insects.

Lampeter pushed open the door of the old house and went inside. A few minutes later he came out, a puzzled look on his face.

"There's nothing there," he said. "Nothing for cooking, no bed—"

He stopped. Mr. Robinson had come round from the back of the car. He carried a spade. Mr. Smith was taking something from his pocket.

For a fattish man in bad training Lampeter moved quickly. And he moved in the one direction which gave him a chance—between Mr. Smith and Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson swiped at him with the spade and missed. Lampeter ran with the speed of fear. Then there was a sharp crack, and a curious

sound like the clapping of soft hands as the air opened and shut over his right shoulder. Then it was as if steel fingers had gripped him by the arm. The force of it almost spun him round, but he kept on running. There was a gate ahead and a line of bushes. And through the bushes something winked suddenly, in the sun. It was the windshield of a car.

"Help," croaked Lampeter, through dry lips. Then something caught him full in the back and the earth rose up at him and the red globe of the sun swung round full circle and he was diving into merciful blackness.

As he went down he seemed to hear, far off, two more shots. . . .

Elfe looked down at the three

men. Mr. Smith and Mr. Robinson were dead.

"That's always the way of it," he said to Gladwyn Hughes. "If things go right, they're terrific. If things go wrong, they destroy themselves. In their code, it's the only answer to failure."

"Is Lampeter dead?"

"Three parts. But I think we'll be able to pull him back."

"Why bother?" said Hughes. He looked at the spade and mattock. "Wouldn't it be easiest to finish the job, and bury them all?"

"My dear Gladwyn," said Elfe. "You can't be serious. Our job is to patch the little man up, then put him in the dock and deal with him according to law. Right? Right."



Anthony Boucher

Crime Must Have a Stop

Another adventure of Nick Noble, the sharp-nosed, white-skinned, blue-eyed inhabitant of the fourth booth on the left in the Chula Negra café, a cheap Mexican restaurant in Los Angeles—the dipsodetective who always sees the truth in wine as he sits swatting an imaginary fly . . . A plea to Mr. B.: please write more Nick Noble short stories, more Noble experiments in what has been called “the normal recreation of noble minds.”

THE THIRD SET OF FLASHBULBS exploded and the actress relaxed and pulled down her skirt. Lieutenant MacDonald continued to stare somewhat foolishly at the silver trophy in his hands.

“Well?” the actress grinned. How does it feel to be the recipient of the Real Detective Award for the Real Detective of the Year?”

“Thirstifying,” said MacDonald honestly.

The actress nodded. “Well spoken, my fine ferreting friend. I always feel a spot of alcohol is indicated after cheesecake myself. Where are we going?”

MacDonald still contemplated the trophy. It had been exciting, very exciting, to be chosen by the top hot-crime radio program for its annual award; but he’d been feeling uneasy ever since the announcement. Despite the extraordinary record of solved cases that had made him the bright young star of the Los

Angeles Police Department, he felt like an impostor.

“Mind a ride downtown?” he asked. “We’re going to deliver this trophy to the man it really belongs to.”

The actress raised her unplucked brows as they turned east on Sunset. “I’ve worked in Hollywood for three years,” she said, “and I’ve never known whether Sunset Boulevard ran beyond Gower. They tell me there’s a city called Los Angeles down this way. That where we’re going?”

“Uh huh. And you’re going to meet the damnedest man in that city of the damned . . .” And MacDonald began the story.

He began with his own first case—the case that started with his finding a dead priest and ended with his shooting one of his fellow lieutenants. He explained where he had found the solution of that case, and where he had found the solution for

which he had just been awarded the trophy.

"You weren't giving awards back in the early thirties," he said. "But there was a man in the department then who topped anybody you've honored. He had a mind . . . it's hard to describe: a mind of mathematical precision, with a screwball offbeat quality—a mind that could see the shape of things, grasp the inherent pattern—"

"Like a good director," the actress put in.

"Something," MacDonald admitted. "Then there came that political scandal—maybe you've heard echoes—and the big shake-up. There was a captain who knew what wires to pull, and there was a lieutenant who took the rap. The lieutenant was our boy. He had a wife then and she needed an operation. The pay checks stopped coming and she didn't get it . . ."

The actress's lively face grew grave as she followed the relentless story of the disintegration of greatness: the brilliant young detective, stripped at once of career and wife, slipping, skidding, until there was nothing left but the comfort of cheap sherry and the occasional quickening of the mind when it was confronted with a problem.

MacDonald pulled up in front of the Chula Negra. He peered in, caught sight of Mamá Gonzales' third daughter Rosario, and beckoned her to the door. "You got any

marches on your juke box?" he asked, handing her a nickel.

So it was to the strains of the Mexican national hymn that the Real Detective Award trophy entered the little Mexican restaurant. Lieutenant MacDonald bore it proudly aloft and the actress followed him, confused and vaguely delighted.

Mexicanos al grito de guerra . . .

MacDonald halted in front of the fourth booth on the left, with the certainty of finding its sharp-nosed white-skinned inhabitant. He placed the trophy on the table, flourished his hand and proclaimed, "To the Real Detective of The Year!"

The actress placed one foot on the bench and lifted her skirt over her knee. "That makes it an official award," she grinned.

. . . al sonoro rugir del cañón boompty boomp!

Nick Noble's pale blue eyes surveyed the symbolic silver figure of Justice Triumphant Over Wrong doing. "If it was only a cup . . .," he sighed, and downed his wine glass of sherry.

That was the start of an evening memorable in many ways. It was MacDonald's first non-professional visit to the Chula Negra; and he was amazed to realize that Nick Noble could drop cryptic comments on the theater of twenty years ago which fascinated the actress as much as his comments on crime had stimulated the lieutenant. He was further amazed to realize the warmth and

itality of the girl beside him, whom he had at first regarded solely as the inevitable wench demanded by cameramen.

They fitted together somehow, her bubbling eagerness and Noble's weary terseness. They belonged together because they were the same thing underneath, the same piercing through of conventional acceptance, straight to reality. MacDonald was growing more and more aware of the girl, more and more aware of the peculiarity of a man's being single in his thirties, when the episode began which was to make the evening completely memorable.

It started unspectacularly enough, with a voice calling, "Hi, Don!"

The voice was high-pitched, but firmly male—a tenor with baritone quality. The man was slight, but firmly built, dressed in the standard mismatched uniform of middle-bracket Hollywood, and MacDonald was certain he'd never seen him before. But even as the man seized his hand, as the actress looked up curiously and Nick Noble finished his latest sherry, MacDonald began thinking back. Far back, obviously. Anyone who called him Don dated from college days at USC. Now he was Mac or Lieutenant or Loot. A faint but ghastly picture flitted across his mind, of something called an *Apolliad*, an evening of students' creative contributions to the higher literature. There must be some reason why he was thinking of that—there must, in fact, have been some

reason why he had attended it . . .

"Steve Harnett!" he cried. "You old son of a—" He broke off, glancing sideways at the actress.

"I've heard the word," she said dryly. "I just didn't think men ever greeted each other that way outside of bad plays and Rotary Club meetings."

"It's grand to see you, Don," Harnett was saying. "I keep reading about you in the papers and saying I've got to look you up and then . . . well, you know how it is."

"Don't I," MacDonald confessed. "I read about you too. I'll go you one better: I even listen to *Pursuit*, just to see how far away from real murder you can get."

"Oh! Do you write *Pursuit*?" Only half of the girl's breathlessness was good technique.

"I should've warned you." MacDonald looked rueful. "She's a radio actress."

"And therefore should know by now that a writer's introduction to the producer is the kiss of death. Still you might as well introduce us."

"Sure . . . Good Lord! Do you realize that in all the hullabaloo of those publicity photographs I never did catch your name?"

"Lynn Dvorak," said Nick Noble quietly.

"Don't tell me that's a deduction!"

"Asked her. While you were greeting friend."

MacDonald grinned. "If all your

rabbits-out-of-sherry-bottles were as simple as that—”

“They are,” said Noble. “To me.” His washed-out blue eyes glazed over oddly as he contemplated the actress and the radio writer.

Someone presumably introduced Tristán to Iseult and Paolo to Francesca. No one introduced Petrarch to Laura, so no one wrote a tragedy on the subject culminating in murder. Someone introduced Harvey Hawley Crippen to Ethel LeNeve and someone introduced Judd Gray to Ruth Snyder.

And Lieutenant Donald MacDonald, Homicide, LAPD, said, “Lynn Dvorak, may I present Steve Harnett?”

So for once, MacDonald was later to reflect, Nick Noble had been in on a murder even before it happened. It was in October, that first and fatal interview, and throughout that winter the lieutenant kept running into Steve and Lynn, at the Philharmonic, at Musso and Frank’s, at the Biltmore Theater, until he began thinking of them as Steve and Lynn in one word, and automatically looking for one if he saw the other.

“I started something,” he would muse ruefully as he had a drink with them after a concert. It was not only that they were physically in love (even to the hand-holding-in-public stage, which was embarrassing in a man of Steve’s thirty-six years); but they obviously fitted together so

well in so many non-physical respects. Their ears heard the same music; their mouths laughed the same laughter.

But with Steve at least there was something under the laughter, something that caused moments when the successful writer, the man happily in love, gave way for an instant to a small boy, terrified of some incalculable but certain retribution.

It was one of those moments that seized Steve as the three of them were drinking after an unusually interesting production of one-acts at the Actors’ Lab. He had said nothing for five minutes, and there was supplication in the glance Lynn cast to MacDonald as she gave up her single-handed attempt at brightness and retired to the ladies’ room.

MacDonald could think of nothing to do but emit that wordless questioning noise and assume that sympathetic half-smile which had caused the Pengcraft murderer to reveal where he had hidden the other half of the body.

Steve Harnett roused himself from his brooding. “I’ve got to talk to you, Don,” he said abruptly. “It’s getting me down. I can’t think straight.”

“Any time,” said MacDonald. “Unless a crime wave takes priority.”

“Dinner next Thursday?” Steve said eagerly. “I’m in Brentwood; it’s in the phone book. Say around seven for drinks?”

MacDonald made a note and tried

smile reassuringly at Lynn when he came back.

"That couple you introduced me?" Nick Noble asked two nights later, when MacDonald had dropped in with a report on the death-cell confession of a man in whose career Steve had taken a certain decisive interest. "They all right?"

"Sure. I guess so."

"Liked the girl. Alive—like Maria . . . Trouble for her. Sorry . . ."

"Why should there be trouble?" MacDonald asked uneasily.

Nick Noble paused and deliberately brushed away the fly which always perched invisibly on his sharp nose. "Call it . . . the Unspeakable and," he said.

There were times, MacDonald reflected as he beckoned to Rosario, when Nick Noble's cryptic impulses seemed to spring from pure malice.

The Harnett home was small, comfortable, unpretentious, and therefore probably only mildly fabulous in cost. Steve Harnett, MacDonald had learned from a few questions of other friends in radio, was well in the charge-account-at-the-Brown-Derby class but somewhat short of the swimming pool level. His questions should have prepared him for his first surprise; but there was one question he hadn't thought to ask.

The woman who answered the door was in her early thirties—

slender, a trifle pale, and more than a trifle attractive, again in a comfortable, unpretentious, and mildly expensive manner. She held out a hand and said, "Good evening. Lieutenant MacDonald? I'm Harriet—Steve's wife."

Abruptly MacDonald understood the Unspeakled Band—the colorless strip on Steve's third finger, left hand. He was still trying to mask his angry amazement with polite conversation when Steve came in, followed by a plain heavy-set girl with a handful of papers. Here in Brentwood domesticity, MacDonald observed, Steve wore a plain gold wedding ring.

"Glad you could make it, Don. You and Harriet getting yourselves acquainted? This is Pat McVeagh, my secretary—Lieutenant MacDonald." And he was suddenly very busy with ice and gin and vermouth and lemon peel and the careful avoidance of MacDonald's eyes.

The secretary left after one drink, without having opened her mouth for any non-alcoholic purpose. Then, just as MacDonald was trying to get the feel of the Harriet-Steve relationship, the elder Mrs. Harnett slipped in and there were more introductions.

MacDonald could not have told you, an hour after dinner, what he had eaten. He was too concentrated on trying to persuade himself that he was on a social and not a professional visit. He was too surrounded by all too tangible undercurrents.

Mrs. Harnett Sr., he decided, was the most obtrusively unobtrusive little old lady he had ever known. She effaced herself completely—a gray wraith in a corner, coming to life only with an occasional plaintive don't-mind-me. But whatever topic was under discussion—another round of drinks, a proposed weekend at La Jolla, a new limerick of Steve's composition—her quiet reminder of her own self-effacement had the power of a Security Council veto.

There were other undercurrents: a barb from Steve to Harriet about the cooking of the dinner, a barb from Harriet to Steve about his prospects in radio, some obscure reference to the absent secretary . . .

It was with great relief that MacDonald let Steve drag him off to the study as soon as decently possible after dinner. It was a good room, from the outmodedly comfortable chairs to the cases full of erratically and lovingly chosen books, from the battered standard typewriter to the miniature electric icebox, of the type usually employed for baby formula.

Steve Harnett took two cans of beer from the box, punctured them, handed one to his guest, kicked off his shoes, and began to pace around the room.

"Necessary adjunct to work, beer," he muttered. "Always figure it takes me exactly a quart to a script."

"You work on beer and Nick Noble on sherry," MacDonald observed. "And I can't drink on duty.

There's no justice in this world." He waited, but Steve went on pacing. "You never mentioned Harriet," he said expressionlessly. "I suppose you must've read about your marriage in an alumni bulletin, but I'd forgotten ten."

"We've been married ten years." Steve's voice was more tenor than baritone now.

"Any children?"

"Last fall we were hoping . . . That's when I met you. But in December Harriet had to go to the hospital. Now they say we won't ever."

"So it all started while Harriet was—"

Steve stopped pacing. "Don't think I'm saying that to justify it, Don. I'm not. I can't justify it, not even to myself. But it's happened—hell, it happened that night down at your little Mex joint. *Dead Shepherd, now I find thy saw of might . . .*"

" . . . Who ever loved that loves not at first sight?" MacDonald finished for him. "I remember, Steve. You always were a sucker for quotations. Lends authority, doesn't it? Takes away your own responsibility for what you're saying."

"Does my radio-trained ear detect what we cliché-experts call a thinly-veiled edge of contempt in your voice, Don?"

"It's no business of mine," MacDonald said optimistically. "But you're getting yourself into one sweet mess. Does Harriet know?"

"I don't think so."

"She's bound to eventually. You haven't been precisely discreet, and here's always a helpful friend . . . Does Lynn know about Harriet?"

"Yes . . ." Steve's eyes rested on the gold band on his left hand.

"In other words, now she does but he didn't at first?"

Steve didn't answer that one. Instead he said, "But, Don, you don't understand. Maybe nobody can until it happens to him. But this . . . isn't just an affair."

"Are they ever?"

"It isn't just . . . fun in bed. It's being together—being *us*."

"So what did you want me for? Name of a good lawyer?"

Steve drew back suddenly. "But I couldn't divorce Harriet. I love her."

"Let them eat cake," MacDonald morded, "and have it too!"

"Don't you see, Don? They're both so . . . so right. Both things. The thing with me and Harriet and the thing with me and Lynn. I can't say: this I cleave to, this I discard. It wouldn't be fair to either of them."

"Which the present situation, of course, is."

"Hell, Don, I'm not an adulterer." Steve managed an odd sort of smile. "I'm a bigamist," he added hesitantly, "There's a quotation for that too: *How happy could I be with either, were 't other fair charmer away* . . ."

MacDonald could not swear why he shivered at that moment, but he

had a rough idea. "I still don't see why you wanted to talk to me about it. I did introduce you, but . . ."

"I think it's because I knew you pretty well a long time ago, but you're not a part of my present life. I had to talk to somebody. I can't talk to the people who know me and Harriet now. I had to talk it out just to see if . . ."

MacDonald knew very well why he was shivering as he replied, "You know, Steve, I don't think that was the reason . . . underneath."

"And it wasn't, I'm sure," MacDonald said later that night to Nick Noble. "You asked about trouble. Here it is, and your Unspeckled Band can prove as venomous as a swamp adder, if that's what it was. And subconsciously, at least, Steve sees it too: that this is the build-up to a standard, cliché-expert murder situation. Each woman has a motive for killing the other; and if Steve ever gets out of the equipoise of his *Beggars' Opera* how-happy-could-I-be-with-either, he'll have a motive for getting rid of the girl left over. That subconscious fear of murder led him to expose the situation to a Homicide officer."

There was a water glass full of sherry in front of Nick Noble. He took what seemed like a casual swig, and the glass was half full. Then he muttered "*Beggars' Opera?*" and shook his head. "Groucho Marx," he said decisively.

Even after long years of inocula-

tion Lieutenant MacDonald could still occasionally be taken aback in the Chula Negra. "And how did Groucho Marx get into this?"

"Didn't ever see *Animal Crackers*?" Noble murmured regretfully. "Long time ago. Way back when . . ."

His voice trailed away. MacDonald understood. 'Way back when Lieutenant Nicholas Noble, the pride of Homicide, took his beautiful wife Martha to the pictures . . .

"But what can I do?" MacDonald insisted. "What can any officer do when he sees a murder building up in front of him—cast and motives complete and nothing to do but wait until it happens?"

For once Nick Noble had not even a cryptic answer.

That was in March. The murder did not come until late April. In the interval MacDonald steered away from any contact with Steve and Lynn; a meeting now could prove too embarrassing. But he heard enough gossip to know that Harriet, if still ignorant, must have no friends and no telephone. And he heard other gossip, too, to the effect that Steve Harnett was cracking up as a radio writer, that his option wouldn't be picked up at the end of this thirteen on *Pursuit*, which with the free-lance market shot to pieces . . .

MacDonald had tried to avoid embarrassment in seeing Steve again. But it was not embarrassment that he felt now in April as he faced

Steve Harnett, beside the pink-ruffled bed which held Harriet's curiously arched body. There was no emotion save cold rage in MacDonald's voice as he roared, "So you finally made up your mind!"

Steve had his shoes off and a tumbler of straight whisky in his hand. He looked up helplessly and said "You won't believe me, Don. Why should you? But you don't understand . . ."

MacDonald controlled his voice "Look, Steve. There's only one way to play this. I'm just any cop and you're just any . . . husband of the deceased. All right, we know it's strychnine; even a layman could tell that. Now tell me how."

Steve's vitality and charm had yielded to bewildered chaos. "As I was saying, it must have been the candy. I was working late and Harriet took the candy to bed with her. I worked so late I slept on the couch in the study. This morning Mother . . . found her."

"Nobody heard anything? She must've gone through hell."

"Mother's not well; she usually takes phenobarbital at night. And when a script's going hot, the house could fall down and I wouldn't know it."

"Now this candy . . .?"

"I was telling you, it just came in the mail and we thought whoever forgot to put in a card would phone about it. It's a kind Harriet likes, so—"

"And you write mystery shows!"

MacDonald gasped. "One of the best clichés—in fact and fiction—if you let your wife . . . ! I suppose there's independent evidence that the candy actually did come in the mail?"

"Mother was with us when Harriet opened the package. She didn't eat any; sweets upset her. And I was drinking beer, so Harriet took them to bed later on. I think the rapper's still in the wastebasket . . ."

A brand-new machine had replaced the battered standard in Steve's study. MacDonald found a label in the drawer of the desk and inserted it in the typewriter. When he had finished typing, he set it beside the label on the wrapper from the wastebasket. There was no telling the two labels apart.

Steve's mouth opened wide. "But does that prove . . . ?"

"No," MacDonald grunted. "It doesn't. It's a new machine. It hasn't had time to develop obvious idiosyncrasies. Any new typewriter of the same model would have approximately the same result. But it does dictate . . ."

The phone rang. MacDonald picked it up.

An impersonal voice announced, "I have a call from New York for Mr. Stephen Harnett."

"New York for you," said MacDonald.

"Sponsor trouble," Steve groaned. "Or the network on that last script—I was afraid it was a little too . . .

Blast it! I can't handle things like that now. I can't . . ."

"Try," said MacDonald. "Occupy your mind while I see Lynn Dvorak."

Steve had started to reach a shaky hand toward the phone. Now he snatched it back. "Lynn! You can't drag her into this!"

"Can't I? You say you're innocent. OK. Who else has a motive? Go talk to your sponsor."

"Lynn . . ." There was horror in Steve's eyes. "She couldn't have . . ."

"Go on. Telephone. See you later."

Steve laughed harshly. "Life must go on and stuff. *And life's crime's fool . . .*"

Steve Harnett's hand wavered halfway to the telephone. As MacDonald left the room he could hear angry squawks coming from the still unanswered receiver.

The lieutenant had never been more wretched on professional business than he was as he drove to the little house in the hills east of Highland, almost in downtown Hollywood.

A baffling case was one thing. That you could sink your teeth into; or if it was too flatly impossible, you could take it to the Chula Negra and watch Nick Noble's eyes glaze over as he probed to the truth. But something so wretchedly obvious as this . . .

He had, inadvertently, started it

all. He had, quite advertently, foreseen its inevitable outcome. And here it was.

He remembered Steve Harnett, even back at the University, as flashy, clever, plausible, entertaining—but essentially weak. There'd been something (he couldn't recall the details) about a girl that Mrs. Harnett didn't quite approve of and how she'd managed to break up the relationship. And there'd been that odd episode when Steve was directing a play: the two girls, both beautiful, both good actresses, both avid for the lead—and Steve's sudden pneumonia followed by two weeks' convalescence on the desert while someone else took over the direction and casting . . .

A psychoanalyst, he reflected, could have fun—probably would have, if there was enough money in the defense. And meanwhile the layman could content himself with the old-fashioned verdict that there were certain people who simply didn't have the courage to face up to things.

There was, of course, the remote possibility that Lynn might be the actual sender of the strychnine-laden chocolates. But how much did that direct responsibility matter compared with the ultimate responsibility of what Steve had done to both women? Except, of course, that in that case Lynn would go to the gas chamber and Steve would probably go on writing radio melodramas . . .

There was no answer to his ring. The door was unlocked, so he didn't have to worry about skeleton keys.

He didn't have to worry about Lynn and the gas chamber, either.

She sat in a chair half-facing the door, well lit by the reading lamp which must have been left burning from the night before. Her face grinned at him, in that sardonic welcome which only a strychnine-fed host can provide.

There were smudges of chocolate on the grinning lips, and there was a box of chocolates on the table by the phone.

MacDonald used the phone to call the necessary technicians. Before they arrived he had discovered in the wastebasket the familiar wrapped and the familiar typed label.

"And now," MacDonald demanded in the fourth booth on the left of the Chula Negra, "where the hell are we?"

"Hell," said Nick Noble succinctly and truthfully.

"It made sense before. Steve had made up his mind. He didn't have the heart or the guts to make a clear cut, so he simply removed the one he didn't want. It would've made the same kind of sense if we'd found only Lynn. But both of them . . . that switches the motivation altogether. Now we have to look for somebody who wants *both women* out of Steve Harnett's life. And who has such a motive?" He paused and tried to

swer himself. "I've got to look to the secretary. Every so often ere's something in this office-wife isiness. She's a dowdy, homely ench, but she probably doesn't see rself that way."

"Labels," said Nick Noble. "Let's e."

MacDonald placed them before m:

Mrs Stephen Harnett
11749 Verdugo Drive
Los Angeles 24, Calif

Mrs Lynn Dvorak
6708 Las Aves Road
Hollywood 28, Calif

Nick Noble leaned back in the oth and a film seemed to obire his eyes. "Mrs. . . ?" he said ftly.

"Lynn? Divorced. Three years o. That doesn't enter in. You'll tice the postmark, too. Downwn Hollywood. Steve admitted 'd been in to see the advertising ency; but that doesn't help now. ie secretary lives near here—which ght be a good reason for not mailing here. And that reminds me: I'm wn in this part of town to see her. l better—"

"Why?" said Nick Noble. MacDonald smilingly disregarded e query. "Oh—one odd thing I got to tell you about Steve. When at New York call came through he ittered something about life goes , and added: *Life's crime's fool.* I ld you he's a sucker for quotations,

but I couldn't spot this one; it bothered me, so I stopped at the library and used a concordance. It's Hotspur's death speech in *Henry IV, Part I*, the same speech Huxley used for a title a while back, only it's properly *Life's time's fool*. Interesting subconscious twist, don't you think?"

Nick Noble's lips moved softly, almost inaudibly:

*But thought's the slave of life, and
life's time's fool;
And time, that takes survey of all
the world,
Must have a stop . . .*

He broke off, looking almost embarrassed by so long and articulate a speech. "Wife and I," he explained. "Used to read Shakespeare. *Time . . . crime . . . must have a stop.*" "Lieutenant MacDonald?"

This was a strange new voice, deep, with a slight Central European accent. Bitterly remembering what had begun when last a new voice accosted him in the Chula Negra, MacDonald looked up to see a dapper little man waving a sheet of notepaper at him.

"They tell me at your Headquarters," the little man was saying, "I may possibly find you in this *Lokal*; so I come. Our friend Stephen Harnett gives me this letter for you long since, but I am first now in Los Angeles with the opportunity to present it."

Puzzled, MacDonald began to read:

Dear Don:

This is to introduce Dr Ferdinand Wahrschein, who is (need I say?) a friend of the sponsor's wife and who is conducting a technical investigation into American police methods. I'd deeply appreciate (and so would the sponsor) any help which you can give him.

Sincerely,

Steve

The lieutenant rose, tossing the letter to Nick Noble. "Delighted to meet you, but you catch me just when I am leaving to interview a witness, and I'd sooner do it alone. But I tell you what: if you really want to know how the local department cracks its toughest nuts, you stay right here with The Master."

And he was gone. Dr. Ferdinand Wahrschein stared speculatively at the pinched white face in the booth, then gingerly seated himself and resignedly began, "*Na also!* Is it your finding that the anthropometric method—"

"Sherry?" suggested Nick Noble hospitably.

Miss Patricia McVeagh had a room (adjacent bath—no cooking priv.) in what had once been an old family mansion on Bunker Hill. Lieutenant MacDonald walked from the Chula Negra to Third and Hill and there rode up the funicular Angels' Flight. He was glad he was in plain clothes. The once fashionable Bunker Hill district is now

tenanted largely by Mexicans and by Americans of Spanish-Indian descent, many of whom feel they have good reason not to care for unformed members of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Miss McVeagh opened the door and said, "Lieutenant MacDonald isn't it? What on earth . . . ?" Her tone meant (a) she hadn't seen today's papers, or (b) such an actre was wasting her time as a secretary.

She hadn't grown any more glamorous since the martinis in March but there was something possibly preferable to glamor in the smile of hospitality which managed to conquer her puzzlement.

MacDonald began abruptly, "don't need to bother you with the complete fill-in," which is one of the best known ways of causing witnesses to volunteer their own suggestions. "It's just a routine matter of checking certain movements in the Harnett household. I gather you weren't working there today?"

Miss McVeagh smiled. "Is that what Mr. Harnett told you? I suppose I shouldn't . . . Look, Lieutenant; I don't have anything to drink, but how about some Nescafé? I could talk easier with a cup in my hand. Do you mind?"

MacDonald did not mind. He liked people to talk easy. And while he waited for the Nescafé, he decided he liked people who lived in cheap rooms and spent the money they saved on a judicious balance between Bach (J.S.) and Tatum (Art).

Miss McVeagh came back with two cups and a carbon copy of a letter. "If it's just where do I stand with the Harnett household, this letter ought to clear things up. I mailed it this morning."

MacDonald read:

Dear Mr. Harnett:

I realize that your financial position since "Pursuit" did not pick up the option makes my regular employment out of the question. But I still feel, as I told you that time when I so mistakenly took a second of your martinis, that a good secretary is also a collaborator.

For that reason, I'd like to offer to place my secretarial services on a speculative basis. The exact terms we can work out if you like the idea; but the general notion would be that I'd work on the usual schedule, but be paid anywhere from \$0.00 to \$2.?? according to your monthly income level.

She stopped reading there and said, "You love him that much?"

"Love?" Her mouth opened wide. "You'd work for nothing just to try to pull him back on his feet?"

"I would. So where does love me in?"

"It would seem," MacDonald observed between swallows of Nescafé, to indicate at least a certain . . . devotion."

"Sure," she nodded. "Devotion to it McVeagh. Look, Lieutenant. Eve Harnett's good. When he does it, he can write like a blue streak.

And when he gets himself straightened out, he's going to hit the big time. What's radio? What's five hundred a week . . . said she blithely on Bunker Hill. But it's true: it's the real big time Steve Harnett's headed for, and when he hits it, I want in."

"This not being straightened out," MacDonald ventured. "It's been bad?"

"It's been hell," she said flatly. "I'll tell you: Last week I was typing some letters on the standard out in the patio. He was supposed to be roughing out a plot in the study on his portable. Comes time for me to go home, he has to sign the letters, he hasn't emerged, I take a chance on his wrath and knock on the study door. He doesn't shout. He just whispers 'Come in,' and I come in and there he is. He's been in there eight hours. He hasn't done one blessed word. His hands are shaking and his eyes look like he's going to cry. I give him the letters, he picks up a pen, and it falls out of his fingers. That's how bad it's been, Lieutenant; but I'm still sold on him and I'll take my chances."

Dr. Ferdinand Wahrschein felt a buzzing in his head. He was not sure whether to attribute it to his first experience with California sherry by the water glass, or to the answers he was receiving to his methodically prepared questionnaire. Nine out of ten of those answers would baffle him completely; but the tenth would

cast a lightning flash of clarification on a long obscure problem.

Pleasantly bebuzzed, he sat back and listened to Lieutenant MacDonald's résumé of his conversation with Miss McVeagh. "I'm sold on her, Nick," MacDonald ended. "Here: read her letter. I'll swear that's an absolutely honest expression of just what her interest in Steve Harnett is. And if she's out on motive, who's left?"

Nick Noble accepted the letter and handed back another paper in exchange. "Something for you to read too. Came by messenger."

My dear Mr. Noble:

My son informs me that he has once met you, and that you have had extraordinary success in solving problems perplexing to the regular police.

Though I do not know you, may I beg you to exert your abilities on the problem of the deaths of my son's wife and of his friend? My son is no ordinary man; and his peace of mind, if you can secure it, will be deeply valued by

Your sincere friend,

Florence Harnett

(Mrs. S. T. Harnett)

"See it now?" said Nick Noble.

MacDonald felt Dr. Wahrschein's beady and eager eyes on him, and sensed vaguely that the honor of the department depended on him. "I can't say . . ." he began.

"Labels," said Nick Noble. "Look at them."

MacDonald looked at the labels. He stared at them. He glared at them. He scrutinized their inscrutability. Then suddenly he seized the other three papers which lay on the table, spread them in a row before him, looked from one to the other and slowly nodded.

"You see?" said Nick Noble. "Clear pattern. Three main points. One: Groucho Marx."

MacDonald nodded gravely; he remembered that one. Meanwhile Dr. Ferdinand Wahrschein stared at him.

"Two," Noble went on: "the cliché."

"Cliché?"

"The chocolates. Everybody knows gimmick. Botkin, Molineux Anthony Berkeley. Why eat? Unless . . ."

"Of course. And the third point . . ." MacDonald indicated the assorted papers before him and echoed Noble's own statement. "Crime must have a stop."

Dr. Ferdinand Wahrschein giggled and beckoned to Rosario for more sherry. This essay on American police methods should be *aber fabhaft!*

Steve Harnett filled his glass of straight whisky. "I'm alone," he said thickly. "Alone. They're gone. Harriet's gone. Lynn's gone too. *How happy . . .* But they're gone. His bare toes wiggled in anguish. "And *Pursuit's* gone too, come Thursday week. And McVeagh"

one on account of I can't pay her any more. I'm alone . . .”

“Are you?” Mrs. Harnett asked gently. She sat unobtrusively in a corner while her son paced the room. “I know,” Steve muttered. “You're here. You're always here, darling, and you know how much . . . Blast it, there is truth in clichés. A man's best mother is his—”

The phone rang.

“I'll take it, dear.” Mrs. Harnett seemed hardly to move, but the phone had not rung three times before she answered it. “Just a minute,” she said quietly into the mouthpiece. “I'll see if he's in.” She put her hand over the diaphragm as he whispered, “New York.”

Steve let out a yell. “They fire me and still they own my soul while the contract runs! But I can't. Not now—can't. Look at my hands. They're quivering like an aspen . . . an aspic . . . an aspen . . .”

He was still judiciously weighing the two words when Mrs. Harnett had finished murmuring apologies and hung up. “I'll stand between you and these things now, dear.”

But the next ring was on the doorbell, and Lieutenant MacDonald was not having any standing between. He strode in, snatched the glass from Steve, and began talking.

“This thing sticking out of my pocket,” he said, “is a warrant. Just to a mystery plot man like you gets all the gimmicks straight, we'll brief it. You couldn't make up your mind, could you? You kept quoting

How happy could I be with either . . . Only there's another quote that starts like that. It was Groucho Marx who said, *How happy I could be with either of these women . . . if only both of them would go away!* And that's the decision you reached. You were going to pieces; and what a nice simple life you could have if only you weren't bothered with *either* Harriet or Lynn. No more problems, no more decisions . . .”

Steve said, “If I had that glass back I could think better.”

“You don't want things outside yourself, but you can't live without them. You've found that out by now, haven't you? OK, take the glass. And take the proof. There's been too much written about poisoned chocolates. Nobody'd eat an anonymous gift nowadays—especially no one close to a gimmick-conscious man like you. *Unless* they were reassured. ‘Stupid of me, darling; I forgot to put in the card.’ And who's the only person who, in person, or by phone, could reassure *both* Harriet and Lynn?

“And the best proof. Crime must have a stop. A full stop. The typewriter was almost certainly the one in your study, but that proved nothing. Anybody could've used it—Miss McVeagh, your mother . . . But typing habits are something else. And typists are divided into those who do and do not put a period, a full stop, after abbreviations like *Mr.* and *Mrs.* I saw a letter of McVeagh's; she wrote *Mr. Harnett*—

M, R, period. I saw a note from your mother; she wrote *Mr. Noble*—M, R, period. I saw a note from you; you wrote *Dr Ferdinand Wahr-schein*—D, R, no period. And the murder labels were both addressed *Mrs*—M, R, S, no period.

"The D. A.'ll want to know where the strychnine came from. I'll make a guess. Your mother's a semi-invalid, I gather. Maybe heart-trouble? Maybe using strychnine? Maybe missing a few tablets lately?"

Lieutenant MacDonald had never seen anyone wring her hands before, but there was no other description for what Mrs. Harnett was doing. "I have noticed," she struggled to say, "twice recently . . ."

Steve gulped and set his glass down. "Hitting it too hard, Don," he choked out. "Minute in the bathroom. Then you can . . ." He gestured at the warrant.

"You must understand, Lieutenant," Mrs. Harnett began as Steve left. "It isn't as if my Stephen were like other men. This isn't an ordinary case. Of course I have to tell the truth when it comes to something like the strychnine, but—"

A dim fear clutched at Lieutenant MacDonald as he callously shoved past the old lady toward the bathroom. He threw open the unlatched door. Stephen Harnett stood there by the basin. MacDonald remembered McVeagh's description: *His hands are shaking and his eyes look like he's going to cry*. His trembling fingers were unable to bring the ra-

zor blade functionally close to the veins of his wrist. The blade slipped from his hand and clattered into the bowl as he turned and surrendered to the law.

"He'll never have to make another decision of his own," MacDonald said to Nick Noble when he dropped into the Chula Negra after his testimony on the first day of the trial. "From now on it's all up to his lawyers and the State. I think he likes it."

"Of course they've made that nonsensical double plea: *Not guilty* and *Not guilty by reason of insanity*. In other words, I didn't do it but if I did you can't hurt me. It may stick; I think he'll like it better if it doesn't."

"Is he?" Noble wondered into his glass.

"I don't know. What's sane? Like the majority of people? Then no murderer's sane: the majority aren't murderers. But the big trouble is with the people who are *almost* like the majority, the people you can't tell from anybody else till the push comes which they can't take. The people who could be the guy in the next apartment, the gal in the same bed . . . or me. So who's sane? Who's the majority? Maybe the majority is the people who haven't been pushed . . ."

Nick Noble opened his pale blue eyes to their widest. "You're growing up, Mac," he said, and finished his sherry hopefully.

O. Henry

The Cop and the Anthem

A little classic from THE FOUR MILLION—about Soapy and Jack Frost's calling card and Soapy's annual tussle with the law—by one of America's greatest tale tellers.

ON HIS BENCH IN MADISON Square, Soapy moved uneasily. When wild geese honk high of nights, and when women without sealskin coats grow kind to their husbands, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand.

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card. Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call. At the corners of four streets he hands his pasteboard to the North Wind, footman of the mansion of All Outdoors, so that the inhabitants thereof may make ready.

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to resolve himself into a singular Committee of Ways and Means to provide against the coming rigor. And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench.

The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest. In them were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, of soporific Southern skies or drifting in the Vesuvian

Bay. Three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats; seemed to Soapy the very essence of things desirable.

For years the hospitable Blackwell's had been his winter quarters. Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time had come. On the previous night three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench near the spurting fountain in the ancient square. So the Island loomed big and timely in Soapy's mind.

He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. There was an endless round of institutions, municipal and eleemosynary, on which he might set

out and receive lodgings and food accordant with the simple life. But to one of Soapy's proud spirit the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy. As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which, though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once set about accomplishing his desire. There were many easy ways of doing this. The pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant; and then after declaring insolvency, be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accommodating magistrate would do the rest.

Soapy left his bench and strolled out of the square and across the level sea of asphalt, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue flow together. Up Broadway he turned, and halted at a glittering café, where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape; the silkworm, and the protoplasm.

Soapy had confidence in himself from the lowest button of his vest upward. He was shaven, and his coat was decent and his neat, black, ready-tied four-in-hand had been presented to him by a lady mission-

ary on Thanksgiving Day. If he could reach a table in the restaurant unsuspected, success would be his. The portion of him that would show above the table would raise no doubt in the waiter's mind.

A roasted mallard duck, thought Soapy, would be about the thing—with a bottle of Chablis, and then Camembert, a demitasse, and a cigar. One dollar for the cigar would be enough. The total would not be so high as to call forth any supreme manifestation of revenge from the café management; and yet the meal would leave him filled and happy for the annual journey to his winter refuge.

But as Soapy set foot inside the restaurant door the headwaiter's eye fell upon his frayed trousers and decadent shoes. Strong and ready hands turned him about and conveyed him in silence and haste to the sidewalk and averted the ignoble fate of the menaced roasted mallard.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that his route to the coveted Island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue, electric lights and cunningly displayed wares behind plate-glass made a shop window conspicuous. Soapy took a cobblestone and dashed it through the glass. People came running around the corner, a policeman in the lead. Soapy stood still, with his hands in his pockets, and

smiled at the sight of shining brass buttons.

"Where's the man that done that?" inquired the officer excitedly.

"Don't you figure out that I might have had something to do with it?" said Soapy, not without sarcasm, but friendly, as one greets good fortune.

The policeman's mind refused to accept Soapy even as a clue. Men who smash windows do not remain to parley with the law's minions. They take to their heels. The policeman saw a man halfway down the block running to catch a car. With drawn club he joined in the pursuit. Soapy, with disgust in his heart, loafed along. Twice he had been unsuccessful.

On the opposite side of the street was a restaurant of no great pretensions. It catered to large appetites and modest purses. Its crockery and atmosphere were thick; its soup and napery thin. Into this place Soapy took his accusative shoes and telltale trousers without challenge. At a table he sat and consumed beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts, and pie. And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers.

"Now, get busy and call a cop," said Soapy. "And don't keep a gentleman waiting."

"No cop for youse," said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like the cherry in a Manhattan cocktail. "Hey, Con!"

Neatly upon his left ear on the cal-

lous pavement two waiters pitched Soapy. He arose joint by joint, as a carpenter's rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes. Arrest seemed but a rosy dream. The Island seemed very far away. A policeman who stood before a drug store two doors away laughed and walked down the street.

Five blocks Soapy traveled before his courage permitted him to woo capture again. This time the opportunity presented what he fatuously termed to himself a "cinch." A young woman of a modest and pleasing guise was standing before a show window gazing with sprightly interest at its display of shaving mugs and inkstands, and two yards from the window a large policeman of severe demeanor leaned against a water plug.

It was Soapy's design to assume the role of the despicable and execrated "masher." The refined and elegant appearance of his victim and the contiguity of the conscientious cop encouraged him to believe that he would soon feel the pleasant official clutch upon his arm that would insure his winter quarters on the right little, tight little isle.

Soapy straightened the lady missionary's ready-made tie, dragged his shrinking cuffs into the open, set his hat at a killing cant, and sidled toward the young woman. He made eyes at her, was taken with sudden coughs and "hems," smiled, smirked, and went brazenly through the impudent and contemptible litany of

the "masher." With half an eye Soapy saw that the policeman was watching him fixedly. The young woman moved away a few steps, and again bestowed her absorbed attention upon the shaving mugs.

Soapy followed, boldly stepping to her side, raised his hat, and said, "Ah, there, Bedelia! Don't you want to come and play in my yard?"

The policeman was still looking. The persecuted young woman had but to beckon a finger and Soapy would be practically en route for his insular haven. Already he imagined he could feel the cozy warmth of the station-house. The young woman faced him, and stretching out a hand, quickly caught Soapy's coat sleeve.

"Sure, Mike," she said, joyfully, "if you'll blow me to a pail of suds. I'd have spoke to you sooner, but the cop was watching."

With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak, Soapy walked past the policeman overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.

At the next corner he shook off his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night are found the lightest streets, hearts, vows, and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air. A sudden fear seized Soapy that some dreadful enchantment had rendered him immune to arrest. The thought brought a little panic, and when he came upon another policeman lounging grandly in

front of a transplendent theater he caught at the immediate straw of "disorderly conduct."

On the sidewalk Soapy began to yell drunken gibberish at the top of his harsh voice. He danced, howled, raved, and otherwise disturbed the welkini.

The policeman twirled his club, turned his back to Soapy, and remarked to a citizen.

"'Tis one of them Yale lads celebratin' the goose egg they give to the Hartford College. Noisy; but no harm. We've instructions to leave them be."

Disconsolate, Soapy ceased his unavailing racket. Would never a policeman lay hands on him? In his fancy the Island seemed an unattainable Arcadia. He buttoned his thin coat against the raw chilling wind.

In a cigar store he saw a well-dressed man lighting a cigar at a swinging light. His silk umbrella he had set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped inside, secured the umbrella, and sauntered off with it slowly. The man at the cigar light followed hastily.

"My umbrella," he said in a stern voice.

"Oh, is it?" sneered Soapy, adding insult to petit larceny. "Well, why don't you call a policeman? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There's one on the corner."

The umbrella owner slowed his steps. Soapy did likewise, with a

presentiment that luck would again run against him. The policeman looked at the two curiously.

"Of course," said the umbrella man—"that is—well, you know how these mistakes occur—I—if it's your umbrella I hope you'll excuse me—I picked it up this morning in a restaurant—if you recognize it as yours, why—I hope you'll—"

"Of course it's mine," said Soapy viciously.

The ex-umbrella man retreated. The policeman hurried to assist a tall blonde in an opera cloak across the street in front of a street car that was approaching two blocks away.

Soapy walked eastward through a street damaged by improvements. He hurled the umbrella wrathfully into an excavation. He muttered against the men who wear helmets and carry clubs. Because he wanted to fall into their clutches, they seemed to regard him as a king who could do no wrong.

At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil was but faint. He started down this toward Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.

But on an unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint and rambling and gabled. Through one violet-stained window a soft light glowed where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making

sure of his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy's ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few; sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves—for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties, and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire; he would make a man of himself again; he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time; he was comparatively young yet; he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but

sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him.

Tomorrow he would go into the roaring downtown district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as a driver. He would find him tomorrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would—

Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm.

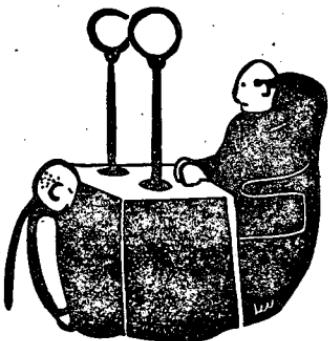
He looked quickly around into the broad face of a policeman.

"What are you doin' here?" asked the officer.

"Nothin'," said Soapy.

"Then come along," said the policeman.

"Three months on the Island," said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.



Stuart Palmer

The Riddle of the Tired Bullet

'Tec tintype: Who is the equine-faced spinster schoolteacher whose hats resemble nothing so much as fallen soufflés—that "meddlesome old battle-ax," that super-duper snooper who is one of the most famous of maiden-lady detectives . . . Hildegarde Withers, of course!

OPS, EXCUSE ME!" LIKE A ruffled Buff Orpington, Miss Hildegarde Withers backed hastily out of the Inspector's private office, where she had just surprised him in the embrace of a pretty red-head.

The spinster schoolma'am was deeply engrossed in a study of some old "Wanted for Murder" posters on the wall when Oscar Piper finally emerged to usher his fair visitor toward the corridor. She was thanking him effusively in a weak, brave voice. "And I'll take your advice, Inspector."

When the tap of her heels had died away, the Inspector came back toward Miss Withers, mopping his brow sheepishly. "Women!" he sighed.

Her sniff was pointed. "And at your age, too."

"And why not?" His Irish flared up. "You're jealous, maybe?"

"For some years," the schoolteacher told him gently, "my interest in you has been purely academic. I barely noticed the woman, except to see that she has suspiciously red-brown hair and that she was wearing

a last-year's suit made over at home. Not exactly young, but still pretty if you like the type." Miss Withers paused for breath, and then noticed that the Inspector had turned back into his inner office. She rushed after him so fast that her hat, which resembled a bon-voyage basket a day after sailing, slid rakishly over one eye. "Wait, Oscar! Is it a new murder case?"

Oscar Piper poked painstakingly through his ashtray for a cigar butt recent enough to bear relighting. "Not yet it isn't," he admitted. "But the little lady was crying on my shoulder because she thinks she's going to be a widow."

"Something she dreamed, no doubt. Or is it astrology?"

"More to it than that. I had to agree with her that Ernest Hawkins is The Man of the Week Most Likely to Decorate a Marble Slab. Don't you recognize the name? Well, you'll be hearing more about him. Hawkins was secretary to old Amos Bigelow, ex-Senator Bigelow, of the Bigelow Buddy Fund Committee."

"But of course. They set out to raise money to send packages to the men in the armed forces, during the last year of the war. I was even asked to help them solicit, but the Grey Ladies work took up my spare time."

"Just as well. The Committee never got around to announcing how many packages ever got to the boys in uniform. The grand jury started to investigate them last week, and Hawkins blew the lid off when he promised to testify, under a promise of personal immunity."

"A tattle-tale, eh?"

"None of your brats down at P.S. 38 are in his class, though. He did the stool-pigeon act up brown, dragging in a lot of supposedly important citizens. He also admitted that fifteen or twenty thousand dollars of the money stuck to his own fingers, but he claims he dribbled it away in the night clubs and gambling."

"Fast women and slow horses, no doubt?"

"Yeh. He even named the bookie who took his bets, so now a tough Broadway character known as Track-odds Louie is out of business and under indictment. Which makes a sizable group of people who would like to cut Mr. Hawkins's throat."

"Oscar, something must be done at once!" Miss Withers nodded. "Think of his poor little wife."

"You think of her. Rena ought to be able to take care of herself—she used to be a tap-dancer around the 52nd Street spots before she married

Hawkins and settled down. I told her that she ought to go home and look up a good private detective agency in the phone book if she wanted protection—the homicide bureau is only interested in murders after they've happened."

Miss Withers stood up suddenly. "But Oscar, you're like a doctor who doesn't try to cure his patient because he's so interested in how the autopsy comes out!"

"Now, my dear Hildegarde—"

"I'm not your dear anything. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll break our date for dinner and the movies tonight. I prefer the company of my tank full of tropical fish—they're so much warmer-blooded!" And she flounced out of the office.

In spite of what she had said, Miss Withers had no time for her aquarium and its miniature jeweled fish that evening. She dined very sketchily on what she would have called "cold nothings" out of the refrigerator, and then went out to sit through most of a double feature. But somehow between her and the screen drama there kept popping up the figure of little Rena Hawkins, who knew that her husband was going to be killed. "It's as bad as King Charles' head," Miss Withers murmured. The woman beside her turned blankly. "*David Copperfield*, by Dickens," the schoolteacher explained, and then fled in the midst of a chorus of annoyed hisses.

It was after ten o'clock, and she knew that she ought to go home and

mind her own business. But somehow she was impelled to hurry through the drizzling rain to the nearest telephone booth, and then down into the bowels of the subway.

The house, when she finally located it on the wrong street in the wrong part of Queens, was a narrow three-story brick, stuck between a chain grocery and a used-car lot. It was dark and quiet, so quiet that the ringing of the doorbell under her thumb made the schoolteacher jump. But nobody answered, in spite of her repeated ringing.

Miss Withers went down the steps, hesitated a moment, and then picked her way back toward the alley, past the rusting heaps of unsold and unsaleable automobiles. From the rear the residence of the Hawkins family was even less attractive than from the front, and she paused to thank her lucky stars that she had never been inveigled, in her early days, into matrimony and a life amid these drab surroundings.

There was however one sign of life here—from a third floor window a lace curtain fluttered in the breeze and a soft light was shining. Someone must be at home, after all. Well, she had come miles and miles to bring aid and friendly counsel to a fellow human being in desperate straits, and she was determined to make delivery.

She turned in through the creaking back gate, past the looming bulk of ashcans, garbage containers, aban-

doned summer furniture and sagging clothes-lines. The rain splattered on rusting tin and there were other sounds, like soft scurrying feet, which she tried not to hear. Hurrying a little, Miss Withers went up the steps and knocked on the door. There was no answer, nor had she expected any. Neither had she expected the door to swing silently inward.

In a way it was an invitation, like the bottle in *Alice* with the label on it that said "Drink Me." So she entered on tiptoe, and then jumped as the door closed quickly behind her. The beam of a flashlight caught and held her impaled. "Hel-lo!" cried a man's high nervous tenor. Then the kitchen light was turned on, and she blinked at a beefy, curly-haired man in his shirt-sleeves and stocking feet, an athlete just beginning to run to fat. There was the strap of a shoulder holster across his chest, and in his fist a business-like revolver. He looked jittery, competent, and—finally, puzzled.

Miss Withers heard her voice, breathlessly explaining that she had only come with the best of intentions and that if he would only dial Headquarters instead of shooting, why somebody would vouch-for her, and if he himself was Mr. Hawkins then—

The man with the gun relaxed just a little. "Mr. Hawkins is asleep upstairs," he said, in a tone which plainly indicated that all other respectable citizens should be like-

wise. "And so is his missus. My name is Johnny Brannigan, from the Onyx Agency on Fourteenth Street."

"A private eyel" she cried impulsively.

"A *what?*?" Brannigan stared at his prisoner with growing distaste. "Lady, you got a bad case of too many movie thrillers. I'm just an ex-cop that got out of the Marines a couple months ago and come back to help start up a new private agency. My job is to see nothing happens to Ernest Hawkins."

"I'm sure you are competent, but—" Miss Withers shook her head. "I learned about the situation quite by accident and got so worried that I just couldn't stay away. But nobody answered the door—"

He sighed. "Lady, would you answer a doorbell if you were in my shoes?" He caught her glance, and flushed slightly. "Anyway, I heard you out front. I heard you coming around to the back, so I left the door open and got ready—"

"So I see. And now that I'm here, could I have a word with Mr. Hawkins?"

"They both turned in for the night, lady. It's almost eleven o'clock, and I got orders not to bother them. They're paying me fifteen bucks a day and expenses to carry out orders."

"Of course. But—"

"Look," said Brannigan, with sarcastic patience. "Let's settle it this way. You leave me do my job, and you get back on your broomstick

and fly away home, huh?" He held the door invitingly open.

She had no choice but to flounce out into the night and the rain, angry as a boil. But the anger was mostly at herself, for getting into a ridiculous situation. "Men!" she muttered, as she picked her way toward the alley. Then all of a sudden the night exploded, and she was paralyzed by a blinding light and a racking roar of sound, which turned out to be nothing more than a suburban train swinging around the curve of the railway embankment, which bordered the alley on the far side, a dike of dirt and cinders as high as the telephone poles.

"My nerves!" protested Miss Withers. Then she stopped, and looked up at that lighted window. It was odd that a frightened man would lie in a room with an open window and a fluttering curtain. The curtain must be soaked with rain, too. The schoolteacher took a deep breath and then began to pick her way up the steep side of the embankment, at considerable damage to her dignity, her shoes, and her gloves. But she finally made it, and then turned to look directly into the lighted window. She stood still for a long moment, and then started headlong down . . .

Across the street from Headquarters stands the Criminal Courts Building, one wing of which is devoted to the activities of the District Attorney. In a reception room,

furnished with uncomfortable modern chairs and decorated with photographs of municipal projects, six people were waiting—six nervous, unhappy persons guarded by an impersonal policeman.

Though the members of the group did not know it, they were at the moment being carefully studied through a one-way mirror set in the wall of Assistant D.A. Tom Minor's office. Minor himself was uneasier than any of them. "I still think we've overplayed our hand," he was saying. "These people are big shots, and they can make a lot of trouble."

"I'm used to trouble," Inspector Piper told him. "Who is which?"

"The old man with the jowls and the flowing hair is ex-Senator Bigelow, professional do-gooder. The hag in mink and pearls is the actress, Maylah Raymond, who used to have Diamond Jim Brady drink orange juice out of her slipper back when she was the toast of Broadway. The fat man in tweeds is General Hector Fleming, National Guard, formerly a famous armchair hero. The tall guy with the lovely gray toupee is Waldemar Hull, world-traveler, author, and lecturer at women's clubs. Facing him is Matthew Gruber, used to be legal counsel for the Watch and Ward Society up in Boston. They say he has the world's finest collection of pornography. That's the entire Bigelow Committee. . . ."

"What about the head-waiter

with the big cigar, sitting all by himself?"

"Louis Margolis, the bookmaker. They say he has twenty dinner jackets."

"He may trade 'em for prison gray," Piper said. "Well, Tom, which is your candidate? Who looks like a potential murderer?"

Minor hesitated. "Well, now, Inspector . . . this was your idea, not ours."

"Okay." Piper looked at his watch. "Five of eleven. Not bad work, considering the order to pick 'em up didn't go out until ten. Come on, let's give 'em the business."

A moment later they faced the group and Tom Minor cleared his throat apologetically. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "You have been asked to come down here—"

"Asked!" shrieked Maylah Raymond. "I was dragged!"

Minor held up his hand. "—to come down here in connection with certain threats said to have been made against the life of one Ernest Hawkins." Behind him the door opened and a uniformed man came in to hand a teletype to Piper, but the Assistant D.A. did not notice it. "You will be allowed to return home very shortly, as soon as you have put up a peace bond. But first I want to introduce you to a gentleman who has a few words to say. Inspector Oscar Piper, of homicide. . . ."

Minor paused, and waved his hand. He felt a crumpled sheet of

paper shoved into his sweating fingers, and heard the door slam. Then he too read the message, and gulped. "The—the Inspector asks me to apologize for him," he continued automatically. "He's just been called to take over the investigation into the murder of Ernest Hawkins. *Hawkins!*" he repeated, staring blankly at the six people who had every reason in the world to want that name on a tombstone. And they all stared back at him. Somebody in the room—was it Margolis the bookmaker?—let go a long, heartfelt sigh.

By the time the Inspector reached the Hawkins house, the complex machinery of homicide investigation was already whirring. The place was blazing with lights, and everywhere detectives, uniformed officers, ballistics, fingerprint and cameramen scurried like ants in a disturbed anthill. It was a picture to bring satisfaction to the heart of any homicide squad skipper, with only one jarring note—the gaunt and unhappy figure which rose to greet him on the front porch.

"Oscar!" cried Miss Hildegarde Withers. "They won't even let me inside, and I'm the one who discovered the body!"

He blinked at her. "But how—"

"I just happened to be climbing the railroad embankment across the alley from the rear of the house, so I could take a peak into the third floor bedroom window. I looked in and saw a man lying in bed, under a

reading-lamp. Only he wasn't reading at all—his face was covered with blood. Quite dead, I could see that. So I turned in the alarm."

She followed him inside, still talking about her adventures of the evening. "Wait here, will you?" he said finally, and left her. When he returned his face was very grave. "The body—?" she began hopefully.

"Dr. Gavin, the Assistant Medical Examiner, is upstairs now," Piper said. "If he needs your help he'll send for you."

"But Oscar—"

"This case has been a headache from the very beginning," he snapped. "Come with me." And Miss Withers found herself hustled unceremoniously into the living room, where Mr. Brannigan, the private detective, was sweating copiously under the stern gaze of a Headquarters sergeant. On the couch lay Rena Hawkins, her reddish hair disheveled and her eyes looking like two burnt holes in a blanket. She wore a man's woolen bathrobe.

"Oh, it's you" the woman cried, when she saw the Inspector. Her voice was thin and brittle. "Didn't I tell you so? Didn't I beg you to do something? You and your advice to go look up a good private detective—as if this clumsy ox was any protection—" She gave the private detective a look that could have curled his hair.

"Hold it," Piper said. "Brannigan, according to your story some-

body tried to sneak into the house last night just before eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir." Brannigan pointed accusingly toward Miss Withers. "It was *her*. I figured she was just a harmless nut, so I let her go."

"Why, of all things, when I was merely trying—" Miss Withers was gasping. "How *dare* you say that?"

"Okay, okay, I'll ask the questions," Piper said wearily. "Brannigan, after you got rid of the lady, what next?"

"I began to worry about Mr. Hawkins. I tiptoed upstairs to see if he was all right, and there was a streak of light under his door. Only he didn't answer my knock. I went and tried to wake up his wife, only she was dead to the world. I got really worried then, because he was locked in and I didn't have a key. So I kicked in a panel of the door, and there he was, stiffer'n a mackerel. It looked like a .45 calibre hole in his head."

"The Medical Examiner bears that out. What did you do next?"

"Me? I went downstairs to let the police radio car boys in, before they smashed the door down. Somebody already called 'em . . .'"

"What was the last time you saw Hawkins alive?"

Brannigan frowned. "Shortly after I got on the job, about nine-thirty, when he went up to bed."

"And you stick to your story that you didn't hear the shot?"

"Not even a loud noise. Nothing."

"How do you account for a man in this house being killed with a large-caliber pistol and you not hearing it?"

The man shook his head miserably. "Honest, Inspector, I don't."

Piper's face wore an expression of deep disgust, but he turned quickly to Rena Hawkins. "Well, are you deaf too?"

She was dry-eyed, but Miss Withers thought the woman not far from hysteria. "I didn't hear a thing," Rena said dully. "But there were two doors between me and Ernest. I was in our regular bedroom on the second floor front. You see, I just had to get some sleep, and Ernest has been tossing around so much at night, I made him go upstairs to the spare bedroom where he could lock himself in."

Miss Withers whispered in the Inspector's ear. "Oscar, I have an idea! Suppose we make a test—I'll lie down in Mrs. Hawkins' bedroom and you close the doors and then fire off a pistol in the murder room, to see if I can hear it?"

He was unimpressed. "No good, unless we had the same gun."

"Oh, yes!" said the schoolteacher happily. "*The same gun!* I wonder if it could have been the weapon Mr. Brannigan was waving in my face earlier this evening? He wore one of those gangster strap things around his shoulder. . . ."

The private operative flushed beet-red. "Ask Sergeant Mertz about that," he said sulkily.

"Sure," said the sergeant. "We took the roscoe off him when we got here. Ballistics has it now, but I can tell you beforehand that it's a new .38, never fired, and too small for the hole in Hawkins's head."

Rena Hawkins said, through dry lips: "There wouldn't be any use in the test of whether I heard the shot or not, unless Miss Whatshername here took a couple of stiff slugs of whisky and a double dose of veronal, like I did last night."

"She was still groggy when we got here," Mertz put in. "The radio car boys say they had to pour water on her to wake her up."

"Okay for now," the Inspector said. Rena Hawkins subsided upon the couch, biting her handkerchief, but Brannigan stood up hopefully. At the look in Piper's face he sat down again. Miss Withers felt herself impelled out into the hall.

"Oscar," she cried hopefully, "I have another idea! Couldn't somebody have sneaked into the house and picked the lock of Hawkins's bedroom, or else climbed up to the window on a ladder and then shot him using a silencer?"

Piper shook his head wearily. "A silencer is no damn good except on a rifle, though the general public doesn't know it. Moreover, there's a Yale-type lock on the bedroom door, practically unpickable. No ladder marks in the soft mud of the yard, either."

She shrugged, "Well, I was only trying—"

"Trying to make a mystery out of what must be a simple inside job. That Brannigan fellow is lying like a rug. Only—"

"Only why should an ex-police-man, with so much experience along these lines, and with intelligence enough to start his own detective agency when he left the service, tell such an obvious lie?"

It was close enough to nettle the Inspector. "Maybe—"

"And with all those people on the Bigelow Committee wanting Hawkins dead—"

Wearily the Inspector gave a résumé of his evening. "I was only trying to follow your suggestions," he said. "Preventive detection, and all that. But we can cancel out the lot of them. Dr. Gavin says that Hawkins died shortly after ten. None of the suspects could have been out here murdering Hawkins and got home in time to be picked up when the order went out. So forget it."

"But Oscar," she cried. "There must be some mistake"

"You're making it," he snapped. "Nobody asked you to come out here and solve the mystery of the locked room. You're off base. Suppose you just sit here a while and let men do men's work, huh?" He pointed to the bench, and hurried upstairs again.

When the Inspector finally came back downstairs, he found her studying the pile of tattered phone books on the bench. His mood, she sensed, had mysteriously improved. "Try-

ing to look up the answers in the back of the book, Hildegarde?"

"Not quite. But I did have an idea. Only none of the suspects seems to live out here on Long Island. Of course, these phone books are a year old. They're titled *Summer-Fall 1946*, and people might have moved."

"So what?"

"The murder was committed between nine-forty, when he went to bed, and a little after eleven, when I first saw the body. The Medical Examiner says shortly after ten. Suppose the killer lived only a few minutes from here—he could have still got home in time to be picked up. Maybe he was laughing up his sleeve, or quaking in his boots, down in the District Attorney's office?"

"Relax," Piper told her. "They all live in Manhattan. But we're way ahead of you. Now that the case is all over but the shouting, come on up and I'll show you how it was done."

"And by whom?"

"That part'll be easy. You see, Dr. Gavin says Hawkins was killed by a .45 bullet that only went an inch or so into his brain."

"Not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough," she quoted. "Shakespeare."

"You don't get the point. The shot couldn't possibly have been fired in the bedroom at all, or it would have gone through him and buried itself in the wall. A gun that size can put a bullet through four

inches of hardwood. The slug that killed him was a spent bullet, just about at the limit of its effective range." They came to the third floor and along the hall, through the door with the smashed panel and into the room where at the moment Ernest Hawkins was posing for his last photographs. Miss Withers took another look at the lifeless, sagging body, one hand still loosely holding a copy of *Turf and Paddock Magazine*, sniffed at the empty brandy bottle on the bedside table, and then turned quickly away. It was a relief to rejoin the Inspector, who was pointing out the window.

"Nobody heard the shot," he said, "because it wasn't fired inside the house. What noise there was was drowned out by the roar of a passing train. You see that the embankment is almost at this level? The eastbound trains go by like a bat out of hell, but the ones headed toward Manhattan have to slow down along here for a signal block ahead. The killer must have been standing on the rear platform, where he'd be alone. Luck was with him—it was a good two hundred and fifty feet, but you yourself know how the open window and the bed-lamp made a target out of the victim. And if the shot had only winged Hawkins, it would still have scared him out of testifying at the trial."

Miss Withers admitted all that. She had more to say, but the Inspector was suddenly called downstairs to the phone. A few moments

later he came back up the stairs, his face wreathed in a wide grin. At the landing he stopped, frowned, and then turned back and went into Rena Hawkins's bedroom, where he surprised Miss Withers poking around among the boxes and bottles on the vanity table.

"Look, Oscar," she cried, displaying a sphinx-marked box. "She does use henna!"

"Okay. So you were right about one thing, anyway! But you have no business to go snooping around. What do you suppose you could find that we didn't notice when we officially searched the place, huh?"

She hesitated. "Sometimes I think that the police only see the things that are there, instead of noticing the things that should be and aren't." She gestured, vaguely.

The Inspector looked at the bottles and jars on the vanity. "Looks like ordinary dime store stuff to me."

But Miss Withers had turned her attention to the heavy, steel money-box on the bureau. "Oh, if that's it, I've got the key," Piper said. "Wanta peek?" He opened it, dumping out a sheaf of old pari-mutuel tickets. "Proving that Hawkins made some very unlucky fifty dollar bets when he went to the track. Probably saved them so he could prove his losses against his gains, for the income-tax people."

With feminine contrariness, Miss Withers had lost interest in the strong box and was peering into the

closet. "Bedroom slippers, three pairs of oxfords, a pair of opera pumps run down at the heel, and one pair of overshoes," she enumerated.

"No Seven-League boots?"

"I was thinking," Miss Withers announced cryptically, "of glass slippers—the kind that Cinderella wore to the ball."

The Inspector said he had had enough of fairy stories and urged her toward the door. "I've got work to do," he said.

"You have your work cut out for you, if you're going to try to prove that theory about the shot being fired from a train," she insisted. "I've been thinking it over and—"

"And the shot that killed Hawkins was fired from a westbound train which passed this point at exactly ten-five p.m.," he told her.

"Just got a report that a maintenance man in the Pennsy yards stumbled on a .45 automatic, recently fired, one shell gone, on the rear platform of a suburban train that ended its last run at ten-fourteen. I'll bet you all the tea in China that the slug in Hawkins's head fits that gun."

Miss Withers was opposed to betting. "I don't see why you're so elated, Oscar. That puts us right back where we started. Because any of the suspects could have been aboard that train, perhaps as a round-trip passenger, and still have had time enough to get home to his residence anywhere in midtown

Manhattan and be picked up by your detectives at ten-forty or before. It re-opens the case—”

“Sure. But now we’ve got some things to work on. We’ve washed out the possibility of an inside job. The shot was fired from outside, and neither Brannigan nor Rena were outside last night, because I personally looked for traces of mud on their shoes. We’ve got the murder gun and we’ll start checking it. We know the killer was a good shot, and that he was on that train. We’ll have men check with every ticket-seller, every conductor, every taxi driver. . . .”

“It sounds like a lot of trouble,” she said. “But I’ve noticed that nothing is too much trouble for the Department—*after* a murder is committed. Except to sit down quietly and think about things.”

He grinned. “You mean the things that aren’t there?”

“Perhaps I do. Oscar, are you still holding the members of the Bigelow Committee?”

“Only for the nitrate test. And the killer was probably smart enough to hold the gun with a glove and then toss it overboard immediately after the shot. First thing in the morning we’ll comb the right of way, naturally.”

“Naturally.” Miss Withers started down the stair. “Oscar, will you excuse me? I hate to remind you, but it’ll be daylight soon.”

“Huh? So it will. Come on.” They came down into the lower hall

of the Hawkins house. Miss Withers peered into the living room, where Rena Hawkins was alone, sleeping sprawled out on the couch and snoring faintly.

Miss Withers gently drew the dressing gown over the woman’s knees and turned out the glaring overhead light. “I suppose you have already released Mr. Brannigan?” she asked.

“Sure. He was glad to get out of it, even if she wouldn’t give him his pay for the job. Last thing he said was that he thought he’d try to get back on the Force, and I’ll help him.” Piper turned. “Hey, Sam!” After a short wait Sergeant Mertz came toward them from the kitchen, wiping his mouth. “Sam, will you be a good guy and run Miss Withers home? She has to teach geography to a bunch of little hoodlums tomorrow.”

“Sure!” the sergeant said. “Glad to.”

“Thank you,” said the school-teacher. “But it’s just that I want to get away from all this confusion to some place where it’s quiet.” And she stalked out of the door.

Promptly at nine o’clock next morning Miss Hildegarde Withers accepted the two red apples which were her day’s offering, and then called to attention her third grade class at P.S. 38. At nine-ten the last of her pupils disappeared down the hall, headed for an unexpected half-holiday. “All work and no play,”

she said to herself, and reached for her hat again.

But it was rising noon when she walked into the office of her old friend and sparring-partner, to find the Inspector taking aspirin and chasing it with black coffee out of a paper cup. "Oscar!" she cried. "I just dropped in to congratulate you. Because it says in the afternoon papers that the police have the Hawkins case well in hand and an arrest is expected any moment!"

"Don't rub it in," he said bitterly. "As you very well know, that's the standard press handout when we are completely up a tree."

"Dear me! You mean to tell me that even with the entire Bigelow Committee as ready-made suspects, you haven't arrested anybody? Do they all have perfect alibis?"

Slowly Piper shook his head. "Worse than that. They don't have any alibis that you can check. They all had motive and opportunity—at least opportunity to be aboard that train, though the railroad employees don't seem to be able to identify anybody. We've more or less narrowed it down to General Fleming, Waldemar Hull, and Track-odds Louie, just because an army officer, an explorer, and a gambler should each have had some experience with firearms. But they all deny it. No luck tracing the pistol, either—it was listed as stolen eleven years ago."

"How sad," she murmured, "to have the wonderful, efficient, infallible detective machinery bog down."

"We found the glove, anyway!" he blurted out. "On the right of way, not fifty feet from the Hawkins house. Only—"

"Only it was probably cheap cotton, untraceable, and large enough to fit any suspect, man or woman?"

Piper nodded, his shoulders sagging. "I guess that was to be expected." Then he cocked his head, suspiciously. "All right, why are you needling me this way? What are you up to?"

"I? Why, nothing at all. I just gave my pupils a half-holiday this morning, so I could play hookey. I made several phone calls, too. One of them was to the Onyx Agency, after I first got the number from Information. Mr. Brannigan answered the phone, and I asked if he remembered me. He said he didn't think he ever could forget, but that he would try. Very bitter, he was. But he did brighten up when I asked him to help me solve the Hawkins case, and told him my theory. . . ."

"Wait a minute," put in the Inspector testily. "Whose side are you on?"

"I am," she said, "interested only in getting at the truth, through any available door. That was why I made another phone call this morning—to Mr. Margolis, the bookmaker. Did it ever occur to anybody to ask just how much money the late Mr. Hawkins lost playing the races?"

"No, and I don't give a hoot."

"But you should. I did ask, and I

found that Hawkins didn't lose—he won. Thousands and thousands of dollars. The devil takes care of his own, they say. Anyway, his winnings must have constituted the money that was in the strong-box in the Hawkins bedroom, before the murderer took it and substituted old pari-mutuel tickets. There had to be something for you to find inside."

"So what?" Patience had never been the Inspector's long suit. "Will you get to the point of all this, if there is any point?"

"By all means. I made still another phone call—to Rena Hawkins. I wanted to ask her who it was that suggested the Onyx Agency to her."

"She said she looked it up in the phone book—" Piper began.

"I know she said that. But the phone book was put out a year before the agency was opened. I wanted to ask Rena if maybe she hadn't known Brannigan when she was a dancer around the hot-spots, and when he was a policeman assigned to the Times Square area. In fact, I did ask her, but she only hung up on me."

The Inspector was rigid. "Brannigan!" he whispered.

"An inside job," Miss Withers agreed. "And you have no idea just how much of an inside job it was."

Piper wasn't listening. "Brannigan," he said again. "Somebody got to him, hired him to do the job. Why, that—"

"We really ought to make Mrs. Hawkins answer the question," Miss

Withers suggested again. "Perhaps if we went out there . . .?"

"Never mind that. *Brannigan*—and you actually phoned him and tipped him off?" Without waiting for an answer the Inspector pressed the switch of the inter-office communicator, roaring orders to pick up Thomas Brannigan on a charge of murder.

It was some time before Miss Withers could repeat her request for a trip out to Queens. "That can wait," Piper told her. "Lucky thing we've got a man stationed in the Hawkins house." He reached for the phone, and dialed a number.

"No answer?" Miss Withers nodded. "It doesn't surprise me at all." The Inspector grabbed his hat and headed out of the office, but she kept close behind him. The departmental sedan, siren screaming, cut across the bridge and eastward into the depths of Queens County. During a lull Miss Withers said gently "Oscar, if you shot somebody from the rear platform of a train what would you do with the gun? Would you put it down gently beside you, or would you hurl it as far as you could? Also, why couldn't the gun have been tossed onto the train, by someone standing on the embankment out in back?"

He didn't answer. Finally they drew up before the Hawkins house and for a while everything was confusion. The door had to be forced and then they found the policeman on duty there. He had not left his

post after all, but he lay on the kitchen floor cold as a Christmas goose, a lump on his head and a broken beer bottle beside him. Of red-haired Rena Hawkins there was no sign whatever.

The Inspector was on the phone, directing the laying of a dragnet, the complicated operations of a man-hunt that would extend all over the metropolitan area of New York. "And put all available men on the railroad stations, the bus depots . . ."

Miss Withers plucked at his sleeve, but he jerked away angrily. "You and your meddling," he growled.

"Shh," she whispered. "Watch your language. Little pitchers, you know—"

He suddenly realized that she had brought a veritable horde of small boys into the house with her, thirty or more round little faces staring at him, smiling through missing teeth, breathing heavily. . . .

"My class," she explained. "But Oscar, before you hang up, I suggest that you forget about the stations and the airports and look for a 1931 gray Maxwell coupé, probably headed south for Mexico."

He only stared at her.

"You see," she hastily went on, "while you were running around in circles in here I went out and had a chat with the nice man who runs the used car lot next door. I had noticed that one car that was there last night was missing now, and it occurred to me that if somebody was in a hurry

to hide some money last night, in a safe place *outside* the house. . . ."

"Are you saying Rena stole the car?"

"Oh, no. The man said it was sold over the phone this morning, to a Mr. Smith. It's being delivered to him out in Jersey City right this minute—the buyer promised to pay cash and I wonder if perhaps he doesn't plan to pay it out of the money that was stuffed under the cushions or somewhere last night just after the murder was committed?"

The Inspector was already giving quick orders over the telephone, orders that were eventually to result in the New Jersey state police swooping down on their motorcycles to pick up Brannigan and Rena Hawkins before they had even had their first flat tire. Which was a good thing, because there was no air in the spare tire—only eighteen thousand dollars, in a neat package.

"They're guilty all right," the Inspector was saying. "But we've no valid case against them. Because neither one of them left the house last night, to fire the shot or to stash the money. I checked their shoes—"

"Feet," pointed out Miss Withers, "were made before shoes. I mean bare feet. And moreover, I keep trying to tell you—the shot wasn't fired from outside, either from the platform or the railroad embankment. It was fired *in the bedroom!*"

"And I keep trying to tell you," Piper shouted, "that it couldn't

have happened that way, because the bullet would have gone right through Hawkins's head at close range!"

The thirty little boys still waited. Miss Withers pushed two of them forward. "Inspector, this is Sigismund and this is Walter—two of my best pupils. When I gave my class a half-holiday, I suggested that they might use their bright little eyes in searching the alley and the railroad tracks back of this house. Boys, please show the nice Inspector what you found?"

Walter nudged Sigismund, who gulped and then started to prospect in the recesses of his clothing. With some assistance the urchin finally produced a piece of oak two-by-four. "There, you see?" cried Miss Withers, in modest pride. "That will do, boys. The Inspector will reward each of you with a dollar, and everybody else gets ice cream."

In a daze the Inspector found himself paying off. The little boys disappeared whooping like Comanches.

"This piece of wood," Miss Withers promised the Inspector, "is worth every cent it cost you. Do you remember saying to me that the gun which killed Hawkins could shoot through a four-inch plank? Well,

it immediately occurred to me that if there actually had been a plank held against the forehead of a sleeping man, and if the muzzle of the gun were pressed tight against the plank. . . ." She gestured.

"Judas Priest in a whirlwind!" muttered the Inspector. He rubbed his thumb against the powder-blackening on one surface of the two-by-four, and then poked a finger into the hole drilled clean through the wood.

"It was a spent bullet, Oscar, just as you said—*even though it had to travel only a few inches.*"

The Inspector had to admit that she was right. He wrapped up the piece of wood in his handkerchief and put it into his pocket. "This will be Exhibit A in the case of the State of New York versus Thomas Brannigan and Rena Hawkins."

Miss Withers nodded. "Hell," she said, "hath no fury like a wife who finds that while she has been sitting home her husband has been gallivanting around the night clubs. Exhibit B should be a pair of new evening slippers."

"Huh?" Oscar Piper blinked. "What slippers?"

"The ones he never bought her," said Hildegarde Withers.



Philip MacDonald

Dream No More

Philip MacDonald's "Dream No More" is a seemingly quiet suspense novelet, but like so many of Mr. MacDonald's stories, it has terrifying implications. In some respects it will remind you of Mr. MacDonald's now famous short story, "Love Lies Bleeding," which explored "an offbeat theme . . . with the clashing forces of the normal and the abnormal."

JOHN GARROWAY AND HIS PASSENGER drove into El Morro Beach a little before noon. The convertible was open, and they could see everything as they rolled down the last hill toward the center of the clustered little town on the bay, with the cliffs and the sea to one side of it, the hillsides with their scattered houses to the other.

To John, whose home had been here since he was a small boy—since his father had died, in fact—the charm of the place was familiar, something you felt rather than noticed. But to his passenger, it was new and surprising and obviously delightful.

The passenger's name was Gavin Rhodes. He was a Ph.D., and, besides being John Garroway's friend, was also his English professor. He was one of those not-so-old, not-so-young men frequently found in the teaching profession. Actually, his age was 46, but he might have been five years younger or a couple older. He was tall and wide-shouldered and

slender, with a gift for looking at once careless and well-groomed in anything he wore. He had sensitive, clearly cut features, with a mouth which seemed narrow only at moments of concentration, and his dark hair carried a nicely balanced flecking of gray at the temples. As he darted eager glances all around, his eyes sparkled. He said, "Enchanting, really enchanting . . ."

"Thought you'd like it," John said. "Wait till we get to the other side. It's even better."

Gavin said, "That, me lad, is hard to believe." It was one of his mannerisms, calling people he liked "me lad" or "me gal" according to gender. He went on looking about him with frank pleasure, but then, as they reached the bottom of the hill and slowed at the corner by the El Morro Hotel, he grew suddenly grave and said sharply, "John! Did you call your mother?"

"Oh-oh!" John's twenty-two-year-old face was sheepish. "Clean forgot." He glanced sideways at

his companion. "Doesn't matter though. Mom—Mother won't mind. She likes surprises."

"Won't do, John." The tone was decisive. "Park somewhere and find a telephone. Your mother may not mind being a surprised hostess. I, definitely, refuse to be a surprise guest!"

Frowning, John shrugged his big shoulders. But he pulled to the curb, just past the hotel entrance. He switched off the engine and ran a troubled hand over his blond, crew-cut hair.

"Don't pout, John." Gavin was laughing at him now. "It doesn't become your style of beauty, me lad!"

"Okay," John said. "Okay." He smiled suddenly, giving in completely, as he always did.

At the southern end of El Morro Beach, Espada Point juts out into the ocean, towering above the sand and surf. It is reached by a narrow private road which turns at right angles off the coast highway, and it is occupied, entirely, by the Garroway property—the rambling green-roofed gray house and its surrounding garden.

Mrs. Garroway was in the garden, standing by the top of the steps which ran down the almost sheer face of the cliff to the beach a hundred feet below. She was looking at the cobalt of the ocean and the gold of the sand and the little, sparsely dotted figures of the few people in Timber Cove. She had been cutting

flowers, and a shallow basket filled with multicolored blooms was over her arm. She was a slim but still pleasantly rounded 50, and frequently looked eight or nine years younger. She had an innocuous, regularly featured face which had been called pretty when she was a young woman, and now was saved from middle-aged insignificance by a pair of magnificent dark eyes.

She turned toward the house and was halfway across the lawn when she heard the telephone ringing. She began to run and burst in through the front door just as the telephone was on its fourth peal. She heard movement at the end of the passage and called breathlessly, "It's all right, Mollie, I'll get it.

She dumped the flower basket onto a chair, snatched up the phone, and said, "Hello—?" and then, after a moment, "Johnnie! Where are you, darling? I thought you'd be here by now."

She listened to a long speech, and the smile, which had made her look almost like a girl, slowly faded. She said, "Oh, John, I don't think—" and then checked herself.

She said, "But of course, darling! I'll be very glad to see any friend of yours. It was only—well, I'm a foolish old woman. I was just disappointed I wasn't going to have you to myself."

She listened some more, then said, "Don't be silly, dear. Of course it's all right! Bring him along right away."

She hung up gently and walked slowly to the kitchen.

She pushed open the swing door, but only a little, as if she didn't want to be seen by the small shrewd eyes in Mollie's copper-colored face.

She said gaily, "Set another place for lunch, Mollie. Mr. John's bringing a friend for the weekend."

It was 6 o'clock, and the slanting sun splashed a swath of gold across the sea and into Timber Cove.

John and Gavin lay on their towels just beneath the cliff. They lay without talking, soaking in peace and warmth and the silence which seemed only deepened by the murmur of the ocean and the occasional crying of a gull.

Gavin propped himself up on an elbow, looked around him, and said softly, "I sat beside the evening sea, and dreamed a dream that could not be—"

"What's that from?" John sat up. "How's it go on?"

Gavin laughed. "I've forgotten," he said. "And it's a misquotation anyway. It's 'I walked'."

"Sure you've forgotten? Or don't you like the rest?"

"Bit of both, me lad." Gavin lay down again, stretching out on his back with hands locked behind his head. His slim taut body, its tan smooth and dark, looked like a Greek bronze.

John said. "What was the dream about? You can remember if you try."

"The poet's I wouldn't know. My own was definitely a compliment—to the Garroway family."

"How?" John said. He looked eager and enjoyably puzzled, like a child watching a conjuror.

"Are you utterly insensible to what you have here, me lad?" Gavin made a little, all-embracing gesture. "That house—that garden—this cove! . . . All this, I might say, and Sanctuary too!"

"I *knew* you'd like it," John said, and then, "Sanctuary? What from?"

"My cherished infant!" Gavin laughed. "From everything that you and I don't want. Everything that grates. All the—the *bru-ha-ha* of our ill-fated century, including the H-bomb!"

"Yes. I see what you mean. . . ." John's young face was grave.

"Now for the compliment," Gavin said. "My dream that couldn't be was—well, put in simple words for the young, it was just that I was going to stay here for the rest of my life."

He laughed, and looked up at the sun. "Hey! It must be after 6!"

"Guess we'd better get back," John said. He heaved his big body to its feet and picked up his towel. He said suddenly:

"Look, Gavin, you don't *have* to go Monday, do you?"

Gavin rose in one smooth movement. His lithe body made John's look clumsy and overmuscled. "I'm afraid I do," he said. "The Stones are expecting me. It's not that I

wouldn't like to stay, but—" He broke off, smiling. "I've remembered the next two lines of that tanzá—The waves that plunged along the shore said only, Dreamer, I dream no more."

"Now look," John said, "You could send a wire and say you were sick—"

"Don't be mulish, me lad!" Gavin's tone was sharp. He turned and started for the steps in the cliff, but John caught up to him in two strides.

"Now don't get mad," John said. "Please . . ."

Gavin stopped at the foot of the steps, his hand on the white post which carried a *PRIVATE PROPERTY* sign. He laughed and said, "You tend to forget I'm a testy old man. Sorry."

"What've *you* got to apologize about!" Relief was painted on John's face with a broad-stroked brush. "I was just nervous, I guess. All I wanted to say was that if Mother seemed — well, sort of stiff and social and — and artificial, it's only because she's really awfully shy. You'd never think so, but—"

"Johannes, Johannes!" Gavin cut him short. "It's nothing to do with your mother—who is charming, perfectly charming. It is simply that it would be impolitic for me to offend a senior member of the Faculty like Bob Stone. You young plutocrats don't realize the economic situation of the paupers who endeavor to instruct you."

"Okay," John said. "Okay." And then he said, "It's a damn shame!"

Gavin was eyeing the steps, running his glance up their steepness. They were concrete built into the rock; their risers were high but the treads were wide enough for two to use abreast. He said, "A challenge, me lad! Race you to the top!"

John grinned. "You'll be sorry!"

"So?" said Gavin, and maneuvered into position for the inside track. "You ready? All right, then —off!"

It was close for half the ascent, and then Gavin forged ahead, to arrive at the top a winner by some half a dozen steps. He was about to turn and jeer at John, puffing and panting behind him, when he looked across the lawn and saw a car roll down the private road and stop outside the garage. It was a coupé—very clean, very shining, but at least twenty years old. Enid Garroway was erect at the wheel, and behind her, its head thrust out of the window, was a big dog with a dark and saturnine face.

Gavin heard John at his shoulder and turned to smile at him. John said, still puffing, "Isn't that—a god-awful jalopy—of Mother's. She won't—get rid of it—"

The dog bayed at them, and Gavin said, "Who's her friend?"

"That's Gill. He was at the vet's—for a bath—" John sounded worried. "Watch him till he knows you."

Her back to them, Mrs. Garro-

way was getting out of the car. The dog bayed again, and John's mother tilted the car seat forward to let him out.

"Hold it, Mother!" John shouted, but the dog was already streaking across the lawn toward them. It was heavy and powerfully built, standing as high as a collie, but with a flat wiry coat, almost black.

John ran ahead of Gavin and roared, "Gill! Gill! Down, sir!" But the dog swerved out of John's reach and came on.

Mrs. Garroway ran onto the lawn. She looked frightened. Her son's big back was blocking her view; then she moved past him, and stopped dead.

Gill was sitting erect on his short stub of a tail, with both his forepaws in Gavin's hands; the dog reached up the full stretch of his neck so that he could lick Gavin's face.

John said, "For God's sake, Mom, will you look at that!" His eyes were fixed on Gavin and the dog, and there was a sort of awed quality to his smile. Mrs. Garroway turned away and walked quickly toward the house.

John called, "Wait a minute, Mother—" and she said, without turning around, "I have several things to do before dinner." She was frowning, and there was a cold stiffness in her voice which she seemed unable to control.

She got rid of the frown before cocktail time, but the stiffness persisted. Whatever she said or did, or

omitted to do or say, the stiffness persisted. She didn't seem able to help it—in spite of the effect it was having on John.

If Gavin Rhodes noticed anything, however, he gave no sign. He was the perfect guest, never speaking unless it was plain he should, and then talking well and easily. And the dog Gill, having started by following him wherever he moved, at last sat motionless beside his chair at the dining-table.

Mrs. Garroway commented on this early in the meal. She said sharply, "Look at that dog, John! Make him go away and lie down!"

Her son glared at her and said, "He's perfectly all right, Mother. Unless Gavin doesn't like him sitting there."

Gavin, blandly ignoring the crackling static of conflict, said he was flattered, and slid smoothly into talk of dogs in general and of Gill in particular. It was a useful topic, and lasted quite a while, with John relating how he and his mother had bought Gill as a mongrel pup from a drunken Swedish sailor in San Diego, and Gavin cutting in, astonished, saying, "Mongrell! He's an aristocrat!"

John stared, and even Mrs. Garroway showed signs of interest.

Gavin said, "He's a Rottweiler, me lad—and a damn good one." He launched upon a brief history of the breed, from its beginnings as cattle-guard for Roman invading armies, through its adoption and develop-

ment by the livestock breeders of Würtemberg, down to its recrudescence as a police and war dog.

"That's *fascinating!*" John said. "Isn't it, Mother?" He was beaming.

And that was the end of that—because Mrs. Garroway said, "Most interesting," and the stiffness overwhelmed everything once more. She hot a miserable glance at John, and then made matters worse by trying again and saying, "You seem to have a remarkable fund of information, Doctor Rhodes."

John groaned, "Oh, *Mother!*" Then he closed his mouth as Gavin looked at Mrs. Garroway and said easily, "My dear lady, I'm a mine of matterings—none of them economically utile. It's a sort of parlor trick . . ."

He went on talking and managed to keep discomfort at bay until the meal was practically over and Mollie brought in the coffee. On the tray he also brought a squat dark bottle which she placed firmly in front of Mrs. Garroway with the words, "Now don't you go forgettin' these onight!"

John winced as Mrs. Garroway opened the bottle and shook two big yellow capsules into her palm. The procedure seemed to have for him a last-straw quality, and he said, almost savagely, "For God's sake, Mother! Do you *have* to dose yourself?"

Enid Garroway stared at him. Her face flushed, then paled.

Deliberately, she put the capsules into her mouth, took a sip of water, and swallowed them. She didn't speak.

Gavin slid into the breach. He took a small flat box from a pocket, opened it, tipped out two white tablets, and casually swallowed them. He smiled at Mrs. Garroway and said, "The trouble with the young is really a matter of psycho-stomachies. They can't conceive the importance of the digestive tract."

It was his first conversational failure. John, still glaring at his mother, didn't seem to hear, and Mrs. Garroway herself merely said, "It's a vitamin and mineral mixture I'm supposed to take . . ."

Gavin seemed to shrug without moving his shoulders. He didn't talk any more, and it was in miserable silence, with the stiffness surrounding them like invisible plastic, that they moved into the living-room. John, muttering something no one could hear, lost himself in the corner by the radio-phonograph and began to search through albums of records. Mrs. Garroway sat, very straight, in her usual chair by the piano. Gavin lounged on the big sofa, scratching Gill's head until the dog suddenly put out a forefoot and rested it on his knee in a gesture of dignified supplication.

Gavin looked at Mrs. Garroway. "I have a notion our friend here would like to take me for a walk. You won't mind, will you?" He said it easily, and then, just as easily,

stood up and walked out of the room, the dog at his side. The door closed behind them.

John slammed the record album shut, scrambled to his feet, and strode across the room to stand over his mother. His face was white and pinched-looking around the mouth. He was breathing fast. He said unsteadily:

"Look, Mother, what exactly are you trying to do? Why not be honest? If you don't like my friends, come clean with it. Tell them—or me. Or if you can't do that, at least remember there *are* rules of hospitality!"

Enid Garroway looked up at him. Her eyes fell from his. She said, "I—I don't know what you're talking about, Johnnie—" and then couldn't go on.

John said, "Oh, yes, you do!" He drew a deep breath. "Either be honest, and tell me—or him!—that you don't want Gavin Rhodes in the house. *Or* behave with ordinary courtesy!"

She said, weakly, "I—I still don't follow, Johnnie—"

"For God's sake, Mother, *will* you remember I'm not a child!" John's hands clenched at his sides "If it's of any interest to you at all, the man you've been so—so vilely rude to is the best friend I'll ever have! A better friend than I've any right to!"

He turned away. Hands thrust into pockets, head down, he began to pace the room. Mrs. Garroway's

eyes were glistening, and now a tear trickled from the corner of one of them. She said, "I didn't mean—didn't know I was being—being uncivil to Doctor Rhodes . . . I—I'm awfully sorry, darling."

John stopped in the middle of the room. His hands were out of his pockets now, and he was beating his fist into a palm. He said, "I can't understand why you're behaving like this! It's not *you*! It isn't you at all!"

Enid Garroway went to her son and put her hands on his shoulders. She said, "I'm a silly old woman Johnnie—I was jealous. Don't you see? I—I'd made a lot of plans—of things we were going to do together, when you weren't out with Betty Lou—" Her voice wavered and broke, and she was suddenly in his arms, her face buried against his shoulder.

Slowly, John's frown dissolved. He said huskily, "It's all right Mom, it's all right."

She pulled away from him and desperately found a handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes and kissed him. "I'm sorry, Johnnie, I'm so sorry."

John made her sit down again, and brought her a pony of brandy and sat on the arm of her chair. Very soon he had steered the talk back to Gavin, telling her the whole story of the friendship from the time when they had met in Gavin's first class of the semester and had immediately liked each other . . .

John's eyes were alight, and he gestured as he talked. He said, "I can't begin to explain what it means to me, having Gavin for a friend. If you knew even a part of what he has done for me, Mother—"

He broke off. Mrs. Garroway looked at him and said, "Tell me, Johnnie—do tell me."

He said, in a sudden rush of words, "For one thing he's shown me what I'm going to do with my life! . . . I'm going to write, Mother! Write—and write—and write! Until I've written something worthwhile." He glared at her, then suddenly smiled. "Listen to me, for God's sake! The boy genius, huh? . . . Look, Mother, just forget all the trimmings and remember your son's going to be a writer."

Enid Garroway reached up, took his hand, and squeezed it. "That's wonderful, darling. Could I possibly read something . . . sometime?"

"Sure," said her son. "Sure. I'll dig out something tomorrow."

"You know what I think?" Mrs. Garroway said. "I think we ought to have a drink on this—" And, as if on cue, they heard Gill bark outside and the crunching of Gavin's feet on the gravel. She added quickly, "Oh, isn't that lucky! Now Doctor Rhodes can have one with us!"

John bent down and kissed her, "Attagirl!" he said. He was at the other end of the room, mixing drinks, when Gavin came in with the dog at his heels.

There was no stiffness in the atmosphere now, and Gavin was full of quiet gaiety. He took a highball from John, and described how Gill had taken him along the beach. He said, "He's quite a fellow," reaching down a hand and patting the dog's shoulder. "Quite a fellow! . . . What impressed me most was the steps. You see, I ran down them—I hate walking any kind of stairs, either way—and instead of getting in my way, or trying to pass, he kept a safe four steps behind me. As I say, I was impressed."

The dog raised its head and stared up at him, resting its chin on the arm of the chair.

"Look at that, Mother!" John said.

Mrs. Garroway said, "It's—it's unbelievable!" She smiled at Gavin. "There's one thing, Doctor Rhodes—you'll never need a character reference with Gill around!"

Gavin looked across at her. "My dear lady! Surely you don't subscribe to that misleading cliché about dogs and children!"

John laughed, and Mrs. Garroway said, "I've always thought the most frightening thing about clichés was that they were true."

"Only in the main," Gavin said. "One might almost say—when they are true they are very very true; but when they are bad they are horrid."

"Like the little girl with the curl," said Mrs. Garroway.

Gavin went on looking at her

with mock gravity. "Exactly," he said. "And let me warn you that the horridest of all is the dangerous, the fatal idea that persons to whom dogs and children take a fancy must *ipso facto* be sterling and trustworthy characters."

He said, "For all you know, I might be planning some skulduggery right now. Such as stealing the silver." He smiled suddenly, impishly. "Or something on a larger scale, maybe"

The next day passed pleasantly, except for one minor cloud which arose at lunchtime and was concerned with John's reluctance to keep a dinner engagement with a childhood girl friend. But when Gavin added a biting comment to Mrs. Garroway's pleas the boy gave in.

Which explains how it was that John's mother and John's friend dined *a deux* that night, seeming to enjoy each other's company as much as the excellent food.

It was almost at the end of the meal that Mrs. Garroway said suddenly: "I ought to thank you, Doctor Rhodes, for persuading John to go out with Betty Lou." She hesitated. "She's a nice child, really. And she's terribly in love with him."

Gavin smiled. "That shows good taste, at least."

There was a silence, and during it Mollie brought in coffee. After she had poured it, Mrs. Garroway took her two capsules from the bottle on

the tray, and Gavin, smiling at her, took his tablets from the box in his pocket.

He said, "Don't worry about John, Mrs. Garroway. He's merely going through that tiresome process known as growing up."

"I know," Mrs. Garroway said, "I know." She sighed, and her face seemed older. She sat straighter and said abruptly, "John seems determined to make a career out of writing. What do you think about it? About his chances?"

Gavin looked at her shrewdly. "You've been reading some of his stuff, haven't you?"

"Yes. This morning. I—I didn't like it." She drew a deep breath. "I thought it was—well, not very well written."

Gavin said, "Don't be discouraged. The boy has talent. Latent—but lots of it" He hesitated. "As to a career, let me put it this way: *If* John has to earn his living when he leaves college, then I couldn't practically recommend writing for his profession. But, if he hasn't—if there's enough money, to put it vulgarly—then I most definitely do! As I said, there's talent in him."

He had been looking down, but now he raised his eyes to Mrs. Garroway's. "You'll have to forgive my bluntness," he said.

"There's nothing to forgive," Mrs. Garroway said, and smiled at him. "Now I'll answer *your* question. John does *not* have to worry

about earning his way. We live quietly, as you see, but then I'm naturally unostentatious. There's plenty of money. More than enough." She stopped abruptly, as if she had intended to say more, then decided not to.

Gavin said slowly, "Then let him write—*make* him write."

Mrs. Garroway looked at him steadily. She said, "Thank you. You've made me feel better. Ever so much better!"

That was at 8 o'clock. Two and a half hours later, John Garroway turned his convertible into the private road and swooped down toward the house.

His headlights showed him the open maw of the garage, with his mother's ancient but gleaming coupe parked neatly at the left. They also showed the unexpected sight of a man's figure, its back to him, bent over at one side of the open door. John braked, and the figure straightened, turned, and revealed itself as Gavin. Beside him was the dark shape of Gill, a short heavy stick between his jaws.

John pulled up on the apron of the garage. He leaned out and said, "Hi! . . . What you doing?" and Gavin came nearer to the car. He was drying his hands on a handkerchief, and he grinned and said, "Washing. Any rule against it?"

John looked past him and saw the tin of powdered soap under the faucet in the wall. He grinned and

said, "What's the matter with a bathroom?" and Gavin looked down at the dog and said, "Gill, you explain."

The dog made a sound in his throat, refusing to release the stick. Gavin grinned at John. "It's all his fault. We found that stick on the beach and he brought it up—I was throwing it for him and it went under your mother's car." He looked at his hands, then ruefully down at the knees of his trousers. "I, of course, did the retrieving."

John laughed. "You and that dog!" he said, and drove slowly into the garage.

As he came out, Gavin was putting the can of soap back on the shelf. They stepped out onto the apron together and John jerked a contemptuous thumb at the coupé. "I *wish* Mother would get rid of that heap," he said, and reached up, pulled down the garage door, and bolted it.

Gavin tucked away his handkerchief. "Got off early, didn't you?" he said. "How was the young woman?"

John's big shoulders lifted in a shrug. "Oh, all right, I guess."

They walked slowly to the house, and on the porch Gavin stopped, looking around him. He said, "God, it's beautiful here!"—and sighed.

John said, "How did you and Mother get on?" He said it awkwardly, as if he'd had to force himself to say it.

But Gavin didn't seem to notice.

He said, "Like a house afire, me lad. . . . She was kind enough to ask me to stay on."

"That's wonderful!" John beamed. "Now I can go ahead with that 'Turtle Dove' story. You could sort of steer me on every day's work—"

Gavin smiled. "After I've spent a couple of days with the Stones," he said. "But I could be back on Wednesday, around lunchtime."

John's smile vanished. He said, "Oh, hell—" and Gavin threw a casual arm around John's shoulders.

The morning came, promising another gemlike day, and Gavin Rhodes, adamant in turning down all John's offers to drive him the sixty-odd miles to Coronado, packed a suitcase, had breakfast, and allowed John to take him down to the Greyhound station in El Morro. Gavin promised he'd be back by the noon bus on Wednesday . . .

The rest of Monday passed, and all Tuesday. On Wednesday, just after noon, the Greyhound from San Diego rolled down the highway into El Morro and hissed to a stop.

Gavin, suitcase in hand, was the first passenger to alight. He looked quickly around, and then started across the street to where John's convertible was parked at the curb, conspicuous by the shining cream of its paint and the scarlet spokes of its wire wheels. Gavin stared at its driver—and broke into a run which took him across the road in long strides.

He reached the side of the car and said, "John—for God's sake—what've you done to yourself?"

John grinned. "You ought to see the other guy!" he said. There was a broad band of adhesive tape across a dressing on his forehead, and two similar patches on cheek and jaw. And his right forearm, as it lay on the wheel, was bandaged from wrist to elbow.

Gavin threw his suitcase into the back seat and climbed into the car. His face was gray-pale under its heavy tan. He said, sharply, "Don't play the fool. What happened?"

John said, "Okay, okay, keep your shirt on. Little car trouble, that's all. That jalopy of Mother's turned on me . . ." He laughed, and started the engine.

Over the whir of the starter Gavin's voice was loud. "What the hell are you talking about? You never drive the thing!"

John let the motor idle. He said, "Well, I did. Day before yesterday. Only a couple hours after you'd left, as a matter of fact." He grinned at Gavin again, plainly delighted to be the focal point of an adventure. "Mother wanted me to pick her up a new tire. So I climbed in the heap and started to bring it downtown here. I thought the brakes seemed on the spongy side, but I didn't really worry about them." His laugh was almost a giggle. "Then I started down the steep stretch past the Golf Club. I was doing about forty, I guess—maybe a little better—when

I saw the signal against me at the bottom, *and* a couple of damn big oil trucks turning out of the canyon road. So I started to brake. Only there weren't any brakes! I mean, not any!"

He giggled again and looked at Gavin, who muttered under his breath,

"So I had to think pretty fast," John said. "I steered as close as I could to the shoulder—it's real soft along there—and I jumped . . ."

Gavin muttered again. Some of the color was back under his tan, but his face was still set, unsmiling.

"Well, I rolled quite a way," John said. "I ended up in the ditch, a little woozy but all in one piece." He grinned. "Good day's work, really—you know how I hated that heap."

"What happened to it?" Gavin said.

"What didn't!" John laughed. "Scratch one jalopy! . . . I'd tried to head it in to the side, but somehow it went on and hit one of the trucks square amidships. Fortunately nothing exploded—but, brother, the thing sure wrecked itself!"

Gavin said, "What had happened to the brakes?" He was pulling a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, looking down at it as he spoke.

"There wasn't any fluid," John said. "The master cylinder must have sprung a leak. The crate was pretty ancient, and that sort of thing is always happening."

"Yes," Gavin said, "I suppose it is." He shook his head. "Thank God

it wasn't your mother! She might—she might have been killed!"

A little shudder shook John's shoulders. "She would have been," he said.

The days ran into each other in gold-and-blue sequence, and now, after ten days which seemed to have passed like two, there were only 48 hours left before Gavin must leave, to return to the University and take up the Summer School teaching which, as he explained with a wry smile, was necessitated by the inevitable penury, in this day and age, of a tutor of the young.

He broke the news at breakfast. John dropped his knife and fork and said, "Gavin, you can't go! Isn't there any way you can duck it?" And Mrs. Garroway, who had long since dropped the "Doctor," said, "Oh, *no*, Gavin! You mustn't leave us like this." And Gill chose this exact moment to emit one of what John called his "lost lone wolf" whines, and even Mollie, who happened to be in the breakfast room at the time, said, "Why, Mister-Doctor-Rhodes, sir, you ain't never goin' to up an' run out on us!"

But Gavin Rhodes made it clear that leave he must. He had, it seemed, already booked plane passage for the day after tomorrow.

"Which brings me," he said, "to the real point. Which is an invitation—an invitation to which I'll brook no refusal!" He smiled at the Garroways, and explained. The Toll-

ers were at the Grand Theater in Los Angeles, winding up a triumphal tour in *Paradise For Fools*, and he wanted Mrs. Garroway and John to be his guests at the performance tonight, after they'd been his guests at dinner.

"There's a catch in it, of course," he said. "There always is with me. John, I hope, will drive us up, but I want to see my lawyer, so I'd have to be in town a couple of hours before dinner time."

And it was arranged that way. They left El Morro at 3:15 and reached Los Angeles just before 5. They separated outside the Biltmore Garage with an agreement to meet at Escoffier's at 7 on the dot. John and his mother took a taxi for parts west, where Mrs. Garroway would do some feminine shopping and John would browse in his favorite bookstore. Gavin set off on foot in the direction of Spring Street.

But he never reached it. As soon as he had turned the corner into Pershing Square, he changed his course, cutting over to Seventh. Instead of seeming pressed for time and a trifle on edge about his appointment, he now strolled easily along the crowded sidewalks until he came to a big chain drugstore sandwiched between a newsreel theater and a restaurant.

He went into the drugstore and came out, five minutes later, stowing a small package into his hip pocket. He started strolling again, this time striking south, but all the time keep-

ing to the bigger, more crowded thoroughfares.

He visited in turn a jewelry store, another druggist, a giant establishment labeled *Helstrom's Hardware—Everything For The Home and Garden*, then back again to Pershing Square—to a quiet tobacco-and-pipe shop.

When he left the last, it was barely 6 o'clock and he still had an hour to kill. Disposed in the pockets of his loosely cut suit were his purchases from the drug stores and the Helstrom emporium. In one neat parcel which he carried openly were the separate packages from the other stores.

He struck over to Fifth again and to the Biltmore Garage. He found John's car and put one parcel in the glove compartment. He crossed back to the hotel, went to the bar, and had two quiet, quick drinks. When he lifted the first, there was a faint tremor in his fingers, but when he set the glass down the hand was a steady as a watchmaker's.

He then took a taxi to Escoffier's. Ten minutes after his arrival he was joined by Mrs. Garroway and John, and then began a highly successful evening, with Gavin as perfect a host as he had proved himself a guest. The dinner was good, their seats at the theater better, and the play itself best of all.

They were home by twenty to 1 and, to John's and Gavin's astonishment, found supper waiting for them. It was laid out in the living-

room, in front of a log fire which had been lighted long enough to be cheerful and recently enough not to be giving off too much heat. It was a good and imaginative meal, with everything ready to be heated and eaten, or opened and drunk. They served themselves, Mrs. Garroway controlling the chafing dishes, Gavin in charge of the liquor, and John feeding the victrola with suitable music.

It was just after they had finished that Gavin, detaching Gill's adoring head from his knee, left the room suddenly, to return with the parcel he had stored in the glove compartment of the car. He opened it to reveal two small gift packages which he carried to the hearth, where he stood between Mrs. Garroway and John. He said, "*Timeo Danae*—" and made the presentations on just the right note of mock ceremony—for John the latest in wickless lighters, for Mrs. Garroway a miniature flashlight for her purse, surprisingly efficient and charming to look at in its case of hammered silver.

They thanked him, Mrs. Garroway with a flush in her cheeks which made her look younger than ever, John with a wide embarrassed grin and eyes which—perhaps because of the drinks he had had—were suspiciously moist . . .

It was an hour later that Mrs. Garroway, pulling a robe around her over her nightgown, went into her son's room. John was in bed, reading. She sat on the edge of it as John said,

"Hi, Mother, come to tuck me in?" He was a trifle high, but in spite of the smile he didn't look happy.

Mrs. Garroway put out a hand as if to touch him, but then drew it back into her lap. She said, "Wasn't that a lovely evening? I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more!"

John said, "It was swell—" and then frowned at himself for juvenility. "I mean it was—perfect. It was whole—a sort of *entity* of a party."

"That sounds awfully clever, darling." Mrs. Garroway laughed softly. "But I think I know what you mean."

"It was Gavin, of course," John said. "When he does something, he does it *right*!"

He sat up and locked his arms around his knees under the covers. He gave up all pretense of sophistification, looked at his mother, and said, "Isn't he terrific, Mom? Isn't he?"

Mrs. Garroway's hand came out again, and this time it did touch him, for one brief instant passing across his forehead and sliding down his cheek. She said, "Darling, I think he's perfectly charming. In fact," she added, "I'm not sure he isn't *the* most charming person I ever met."

She stood up then, bent over the bed, and kissed her son. "You'd better go to sleep, hadn't you, Johnnie?" she said. "Didn't I hear you promising Gavin you'd finish that story before he left?"

"That's right," John said, and as she reached the door he put down his book and turned out the light.

Mrs. Garroway went back to her own room, passing the head of the stairs. She didn't see Gill—whom she'd put to bed on the back porch half an hour ago—crouching at the foot.

Her door closed, and the dog began noiselessly to mount the stairs. He reached the landing and padded along the corridor of the ell, toward the guest rooms. He stopped at the last door and raised a tentative foot to scratch at the lower panel.

Inside the room, Gavin Rhodes started involuntarily at the sound. In pajamas, he was seated at the writing table in the window. Spread out over the blotter in front of him was a newspaper upon which, open and spilling their contents, were the packages he had carried back in his pockets from Los Angeles.

The scratch at the door came again. Gavin smiled and got to his feet. He opened the door silently, and Gill flowed into the room.

Gavin said quietly, "Hello, chum—late tonight, aren't you?"

Gill wagged the whole rear half of his big body. Gavin stroked his head, then pointed to the corner by the head of the bed. Without hesitation, the dog padded over, settled himself on the rug, and lay down. One contented sigh, and then he slept.

Gavin sat down at the writing table again. He lifted a hand and saw that it was trembling. Then he leaned back, deliberately relaxing, closing his eyes and letting his arms hang down almost to the floor.

After a few moments he opened his eyes and sat up. He held both hands out, looking at them. The fingers were steady now. He hitched his chair closer to the table picked up a small cardboard box which had come out of one of the packages, opened it, and shook out the upper and lower halves of several gelatin capsules, ready to be filled and put together. The capsules were yellow.

Gavin picked out two halves and placed them in the middle of the newspaper. From another package he took a small envelope which he opened carefully. It was filled with a fine-grained, dark-gray powder, which he spooned into the lower half of the capsule with the blade of a penknife until the gelatine container was half full. . . . Now the last of the packages—and another envelope—and a little pile of brownish crystals which he added to the powder . . .

And then he was staring down at a complete capsule, dark-yellow against the white paper, which was identical in size and color with the capsules which Enid Garroway took every night with her coffee.

It was over. It was done. At the first try. He examined it carefully, holding it this way and that against the light. Satisfied, he crossed to the closet and very carefully put the capsule into a pocket of his dark jacket.

He crossed the room and picked up a traveling clock from the bedside table. Its hands stood at twenty

minutes past 3. He pondered a moment, set the alarm for 7:30, then went back to the writing table and carefully wrapped the remains of all the packages in the newspaper, making a neat parcel which he slid under his pillow.

Five minutes later he was in bed.

The alarm went off, faithfully, at half-past 7.

Gavin dragged himself out of bed, shaved, and took a shower, making a minimum of noise in the process.

He was out of the house, Gill beside him, at five minutes to 8—having heard vague sounds of Mollie beginning to move about in her room behind the garage. Beneath his coat was the parcel wrapped in newspaper.

He circled the garden and came to the latticed enclosure which hid the big incinerator. Quietly, he lifted the iron lid and slipped the parcel into the dark maw.

He struck a match, touched it to the edge of the paper, and stood by, picking up the iron bar which served for a poker and continually stirring at the flaming mass until, with hardly a wisp of smoke, it was completely consumed.

He raked over the pile of ash, then put the poker back as he had found it. With Gill at his heels, he left the latticed enclosure and went along the path beside the privet hedge and came to the steps to the beach.

He trotted down their steepness, not quite so fast as usual. Gill, who

had dropped behind, followed four steps behind.

They reached the sand and started along it, southward. The dog shed his staidness and raced around Gavin in furious, ever-widening circles. The beach was deserted, and the little breeze off the ocean was light and heady, like a good champagne, and the climbing sun sparkled on the crests of the little rippling waves.

Gavin breathed deeply as he walked. At first his hands were thrust into his pockets, but presently he took them out and, still walking, held them in front of him, eyeing them critically. They were steady, absolutely steady, and he smiled to himself. He spotted a piece of driftwood, picked it up, and threw it into the gentle foam of the surf as Gill plunged delightedly after it . . .

They reached the house again at 9:30, Gavin looking as fresh as if he had had eight hours of undisturbed sleep; Gill was drenched and ecstatic. Gavin left him outside to dry off, went in, found Mollie, and within minutes was eating an enormous breakfast.

It was 11 before Mrs. Garroway came downstairs, and nearly noon before there was any sight of John. He appeared in robe and pajamas, announcing that he had a hangover and regarding Gavin's obvious well-being with admiring awe.

Gavin laughed at him. "All you need, me lad, is a good honest sweat." He outlined a program:

John would eat; John would change; John and Gavin would visit the Tennis Club and play two hard sets of singles, after which they would drive straight back, go down to the beach, and swim.

John blinked. "But I've got to work," he said. "You wanted me to finish that thing—"

Gavin cut him short. "You'll never write a line worth anything, me lad, with a head full of cotton!"

As it turned out, Gavin's program was carried out to the full, so that it was past mid-afternoon before John could get back to his own room and start to write. He felt better. He felt, as he said, wonderful; but time is time and it was with a worried look that he appeared for cocktails several minutes late.

He said, "Gavin, I just can't finish it in time!"

Gavin said, "In the remote days of my infancy, I had an English nurse. She used to say, 'There's no such word as *cahn't* in the diction'ry, Mister Gavin.' I think she had something there . . ."

Mrs. Garroway said, "You can make it, John."

John grinned ruefully. "I guess I can," he said, and the topic wasn't touched upon again until the end of dinner when Gavin suddenly said, looking at his watch:

"Why don't you take your coffee upstairs and start in, me lad. I'll be on the beach in an hour and a half, and you can meet me there." He smiled at Mrs. Garroway. "If you

don't mind my taking Gill for a farewell walk?" he said.

"Of course I don't!" Mrs. Garroway said.

"But look, Gavin—" John checked abruptly as Gavin looked at him with one eyebrow raised. "Okay, okay!" He picked up his coffee-cup, grinned, and said, "What a slave-driver!" to his mother and went quickly out of the room.

They heard his footsteps going up the stairs, and Gavin glanced at Mrs. Garroway apologetically. He said, "I'm sorry. Perhaps I shouldn't ride him so hard."

Mrs. Garroway said, "It's good for him, Gavin," She smiled. "And you know it."

Gavin said, "You're very understanding," and smiled back at her, gratefully.

Mrs. Garroway said, "Oh, my pills—" and reached for the bottle on the tray. She wasn't looking at Gavin as she unscrewed the top and shook out two capsules—and for one flickering instant his face paled and contorted, like the face of a man before making some tremendous and dangerous effort. But then he was himself again. As the women put the capsules into her mouth and reached for her water glass, he said lightly, "Ah, yes, medicine time!" and pulled out his box of tablets—

And fumbled it, most realistically. The little box flew up into the air. He reached out, grabbing for it, and as he caught it, his hand came quickly down, his wrist striking against

Mrs. Garroway's bottle of capsules and knocking it off the tray.

The capsules spilled over the table, some of them rolling. As if flustered, Gavin grabbed at the bottle itself, apparently righting it but in the process shaking out the remaining capsules. They were now strewn all around, yellow against the white of the cloth.

He said, "I'm so sorry—how clumsy of me!" and dropped his box of tablets back into his pocket with his right hand, holding the bottle in his left.

Mrs. Garroway laughed. She said, "No harm done," and began to collect the few capsules which had fallen onto the tray.

As she spoke, Gavin's right hand came out of his pocket, and hidden in its cupped palm was the capsule he had made himself during the night.

He stood up, saying, "Now don't you bother. The least I can do is to collect them for you."

He was very busy—and very careful. The first capsule that went into the bottle was the one from his pocket, and he kept the bottle motionless until there were enough other capsules on top of the first to hold it in place at the bottom.

He was very busy—and very careful. He even counted the capsules as he picked them up. At the end he said, "That's seventy-six. . . . Would that be right?"

Mrs. Garroway smiled. "Just about, I should think. Please don't worry about it."

Gavin put the bottle back on the tray. He sat down, one hand casually in a jacket pocket. He let the extra capsule, which he had replaced with his, slip from his fingers inside the pocket. He saw Mrs. Garroway reaching for the cigarettes and was quick to hand them to her, then hold a light.

In a little while they moved into the living-room, and, as he had known she would, she said, "Is it too warm for a fire, do you think?"

"Not a bit," he replied easily. He crossed to the hearth and lit the gas jets under the logs. When he came back to his chair, the extra capsule was no longer in his pocket; in fact, it was no longer in existence—except as ashes.

They chatted—about the theater last night, about John, about Gill, about the new car Mrs. Garroway was buying. He forced himself to go slowly, but at last the moment arrived when he could properly glance at his watch in such a way that the woman was bound to say, as she did, "Isn't it about time for Gill's walk?"

Hearing his name, the dog jumped up, his head turned to look expectantly at his idol.

Gavin smiled at his hostess and spoke to the dog. "All right," he said. "All right, you bully!" He got to his feet. "I'll just go and change my shoes," he said, and Mrs. Garroway asked, "Do you think John's finished?"

Gavin tilted his head toward the ceiling, holding up a finger for si-

lence. Faintly from above came the sound of a typewriter, working in hesitant bursts.

Gavin said, "He's trying, anyway."

"He'll get it done," Mrs. Garroway said. Gavin nodded and got himself out of the room, Gill ahead of him, as she picked up a book.

He went upstairs quietly. He could hear the boy's typewriter still going. He reached his room, shut himself into it, and dropped into a chair as if his legs suddenly had lost the strength to hold him upright. He found he was shaking, shaking all over, and determinedly he relaxed his whole body, dropping his arms down to his sides, thrusting out his feet, letting his head loll back as he drew deep breaths into his lungs.

Gill crouched beside the chair. After a minute or two he whined low in his throat.

Gavin sat up. He looked at his hands, then down at the dog. He said, "You blackguardly old villain!" and pulled himself out of the chair, quite steadily, went to the closet, found his beach shoes, and put them on.

As he tied the laces, his lips were moving, reflecting the simple arithmetic running through his head—

Seventy-six at two per day . . . that equals thirty-eight days . . . which is a week over a month . . . and I'll have been away from here so long I'll be just a friend of the bereaved . . .

He heard the whispers coming from his mouth and cut them off abruptly. He finished tying the lace of the second shoe, straightened, and called loudly, "Come on, Gill!" and marched out of the room and along the passage of the ell to the head of the stairs. He could still hear the typewriter stammering from John's room.

He ran down the stairs with Gill behind him. They left the house and struck out over the lawn, toward the steps to the beach. He was halfway across, the dog at his heels, when he saw Mrs. Garroway coming toward him. In the bright pale moonlight he could see her clearly. There was a bunch of roses in her hand, and she held them up as she neared him.

She said, "Growing flowers is a vice, almost. One can't ever leave the poor things alone."

Gavin said, "Maybe they prefer you to pick them," and she laughed softly, "You ought to have been a diplomat, Gavin!" Then she started for the house as he gave her a mock salute and went on toward the steps to the beach.

He reached them, and Gill fell behind. Gavin was now in full command of himself again; he was even whistling as he started down the steps at his usual trot.

He reached the bend in the cliff, where the steps took their only curve.

His whistling was cut off, in the middle of a bar. He seemed to

stumble—and pitched outward and downward in a curving, head-foremost, terrifying arc. A strange sound, half scream, half shout came from him—followed by an instant of eerie silence which mingled with the hush-hushing noise of the gentle surf and was then broken by a series of soft and crushing semi-liquid thuds from seventy feet below.

And then no sound—no sound at all except the surf.

But the cry that had come from him—that half-shouted scream—seemed to hang in the air as if it were fighting not to die away into nothingness. On the porch, Mrs. Garroway stood with her head half-turned. The sound seemed to have frozen her—but after a moment she dropped the flowers and ran toward the steps.

As she reached the head of them, another sound broke through the murmur of the surf. It was the lost and lonely and broken-hearted baying of a dog.

She started down, reached the curve, and stopped on the angled step. She bent quickly—and from the tough, two-inch-thick trunk of a laurel in the cliffside unwound the double strand of garden wire that was wrapped around the laurel trunk and stretched across four inches above the tread of the step, to a post on the other side.

One end free, she moved quickly to the far side of the step, starting to untie the other end of the wire

from the post. From below, the howling of the dog mounted in crescendo—and through it she heard a window being flung open in the house above—and then John's voice shouting, "Gill—Gill! . . . Is there anyone down there? . . . What's going on?"

Mrs. Garroway stood up. The cliff-face hid her from the house. She called, frantically, "John—John—hurry! . . . Gavin's hurt!"

Her hands, steady and certain, coiled the wire neatly and slipped it into a side-pocket of her dress.

It was midnight—and it was all over.

Mrs. Garroway closed the front door behind Doctor Gundarsen and leaned against it, closing her eyes. Around her, the quietness of the house closed in.

She was tired—but it was all over. The body of Gavin Rhodes had been taken away. It was all over—the sirens, the ambulance, the questions, the sympathy. It was finished.

Upstairs, John was sleeping like a weary child under the shot of sedation Doctor Gundarsen had given him. Off in her room, the exhausted Mollie also slept soundly.

Mrs. Garroway was alone. She opened her eyes and stood away from the door and walked slowly across the hall to the shelves beside the telephone. On the bottom shelf, where it always stood, was her gardening basket. She took the coil of wire from the pocket of her dress

and dropped it into the basket, on top of her pruning shears.

Then she walked along the passage to the dark kitchen. As she entered, she could hear the surf below. She switched on a light and crossed to the screen door of the back porch. She peered through the screen and could see Gill lying on his bed. She said, "Poor Gill!" But the dog gave no sign of hearing her. It lay there, seeming somehow to look smaller, its heavy head slumped between outspread forepaws.

Mrs. Garroway crossed back to the sink. She turned on the cold water, then reach up to a cupboard,

and took down the dark bottle which held her capsules.

For a long moment she looked at it meditatively—and then unscrewed the top, and reached under the sink and switched on the garbage disposal. The blades whirred grindingly as she upended the bottle over the sink and watched the capsules disappear.

She switched off the motor, and let the water run for a long moment while she put the top back on the bottle and put it into her pocket.

Then she turned off the water, turned off the light, and went slowly out . . .



J. Jefferson Farjeon

Waiting for the Police

Mr. Farjeon was noted in England for his keen wit and for his ability to depict the "grandly sinister" against a background of pure horror. You will find both qualities—humor and horror—in "Waiting for the Police." Impossible combination? Read the story and see.

I WONDER WHERE MR. WAINwright's gone?" said Mrs. Mayton. It didn't matter to her in the least where he had gone. All that mattered in regard to her second floor back was that he paid his three guineas a week regularly for board and lodging, baths extra. But life—and particularly evening life—was notoriously dull in her boarding house, and every now and again one tried to whip up a little interest.

"Did he go?" asked Monty Smith.

It didn't matter to him, either, but he was as polite as he was pale, and he always did his best to keep any ball rolling.

"I thought I heard the front door close," answered Mrs. Mayton.

"Perhaps he went out to post a letter," suggested Miss Wicks, without pausing in her knitting. She had knitted for seventy years, and looked good for another seventy.

"Or perhaps it wasn't him at all," added Bella Randall. Bella was the boarding house lovely, but no one had taken advantage of the fact.

"You mean, it might have been

someone else?" inquired Mrs. Mayton.

"Yes," agreed Bella.

They all considered the alternative earnestly. Mr. Calthrop, coming suddenly out of a middle-aged doze, joined in the thinking without any idea what he was thinking about.

"Perhaps it was Mr. Penbury," said Mrs. Mayton, at last. "He's always popping in and out."

But it was not Mr. Penbury, for that rather eccentric individual walked into the drawing room a moment later.

His arrival interrupted the conversation, and the company reverted to silence. Penbury always had a chilling effect. He possessed a brain, and since no one understood it when he used it, it was resented. But Mrs. Mayton never allowed more than three minutes to go by without a word; and so, when the new silence had reached its allotted span, she turned to Penbury and asked,

"Was that Mr. Wainwright who went out a little time ago?"

Penbury looked at her oddly.

"What makes you ask that?" he said.

"Well, I was just wondering."

"I see," answered Penbury slowly. The atmosphere seemed to tighten, but Miss Wicks went on knitting. "And are you all wondering?"

"We decided perhaps he'd gone out to post a letter," murmured Bella.

"No, Wainwright hasn't gone out to post a letter," responded Penbury. "He's dead."

The effect was instantaneous and galvanic. Bella gave a tiny shriek. Mrs. Mayton's eyes became two startled glass marbles. Monty Smith opened his mouth and kept it open. Mr. Calthrop, in a split second, lost all inclination to doze. Miss Wicks looked definitely interested, though she did not stop knitting. That meant nothing, however. She had promised to knit at her funeral.

"Dead?" gasped Mr. Calthrop.

"Dead," repeated Penbury. "He is lying on the floor of his room. He is rather a nasty mess."

Monty leapt up, and then sat down again.

"You—you don't mean—?" he gulped.

"That is exactly what I mean," replied Penbury.

There had been countless silences in Mrs. Mayton's drawing room, but never a silence like this one. Miss Wicks broke it.

"Shouldn't the police be sent for?" she suggested.

"The police have already been sent for," said Penbury. "I 'phoned the station just before coming into the room."

"How long—that is—when do you expect—?" stammered Monty.

"The police? I should say in two or three minutes," responded Penbury. His voice suddenly shed its cynicism and became practical. "Shall we try and make use of these two or three minutes? We shall all be questioned, and perhaps we can clear up a little ground before they arrive."

Mr. Calthrop bridled.

"But this is nothing to do with any of us, sir!" he exclaimed.

"The police will not necessarily accept our word for it," answered Penbury. "That is why I propose that we consider our alibis in advance. I am not a doctor, but I estimate from my brief examination of the body that it has not been dead more than an hour. It could not, of course, be more than an hour and a half," he went on, glancing at the clock, "since it is now ten past nine, and at twenty to eight we saw him leave the dining room for his bedroom—"

"How do you know he went to his bedroom?" interrupted Miss Wicks.

"Because, having a headache, I followed him upstairs to go to mine for some aspirin, and my room is immediately opposite his," Penbury explained. "Now, if my assumption is correct, he was killed between ten

minutes past eight and ten minutes past nine, so anyone who can prove that he or she has remained in this room during all that time should have no worry."

"We've all been out of the room," Miss Wicks announced.

"That is unfortunate," murmured Penbury.

"But so have *you!*" exclaimed Monty, with nervous aggression.

"Yes—so I have," replied Penbury. "Then let me give my alibi first. At twenty minutes to eight I followed Wainwright up to the second floor. Before going into his room he made an odd remark which—in the circumstances—is worth repeating. 'There's somebody in this house who doesn't like me very much,' he said. 'Only one?' I answered. 'You're luckier than I am.' Then he went into his room, and that was the last time I saw him alive. I went into my room. I took two aspirin tablets. I went into the bathroom to wash them down with a drink of water. By the way, my water bottle again needs filling, Mrs. Mayton. Then as my head was still bad, I thought a stroll would be a good idea, and I went out. I kept out till—approximately—nine o'clock. Then I came back. The door you heard closing, Mrs. Mayton, was not Wainwright going out. It was me coming in."

"Wait a moment!" ejaculated Bella. "How did you know Mrs. Mayton heard the front door close? You weren't here!"

Penbury regarded her with interest and respect.

"Intelligent," he murmured.

"Now, then, don't take too long thinking of an answer!" glared Mr. Calthrop.

"I don't need any time at all to think of an answer," retorted Penbury. "I know because I listened outside the door. But may I finish my statement in my own way? Thank you! As I say, I came back. I went up to my room." He paused. "On the floor I found a handkerchief. It wasn't mine. It hadn't been there when I left. I wondered whether it was Wainwright's—whether he'd been poking around. I went into his room to ask if the handkerchief was his. I found him lying on the floor near his bed. Dressed, of course. On his back. Head towards the window, one arm stretched towards the fireplace. Stabbed through the heart. But no sign of what he'd been stabbed with. . . . It looks to me a small wound, but deep. It found the spot all right. . . . The window was closed and fastened. Whoever did it entered through the door. I left the room and locked the door. I knew no one should go in again till the police and police doctor turned up. I decided to make sure that no one did. I came down. The telephone, as you know, is in the dining room. Most inconvenient. It should be in the hall. Passing the drawing room door I listened, to hear what you all were talking about. I heard Mrs. Mayton say, 'I

wonder where Mr. Wainwright's gone?" You, Smith, answered, "Did he go?" And Mrs. Mayton replied, "I thought I heard the front door close". Then I went into the dining room and telephoned the police. And then I joined you."

Flushed and emotional, Mrs. Mayton challenged him.

"Why did you sit here for three minutes without telling us?"

"I was watching you," answered Penbury, coolly.

"Well, I call that a rotten alibi!" exclaimed Mr. Calthrop. "Who's to prove you were out all that time?"

"At half-past eight I had a cup of coffee at the coffee-stall in Junkers Street," replied Penbury. "That's over a mile away. It's not proof, I admit, but they know me there, you see, and it may help. Well, who's next?"

"I am," said Bella. "I left the room to blow my nose. I went to my room for a handkerchief. And here it is!" she concluded, producing it.

"How long were you out of the room?" pressed Penbury.

"Five minutes, I should say."

"A long time to get a handkerchief?"

"Perhaps. But I not only blew my nose, I powdered it."

"That sounds good enough," admitted Penbury. "Would you oblige next, Mr. Calthrop? We all know you walk in your sleep. A week ago you walked into my room, didn't you. Have you lost a handkerchief?"

"What the devil are you implying?" exclaimed Mr. Calthrop glaring.

"Has Mr. Calthrop dozed during the past hour?" pressed Penbury.

"Suppose I have?" he cried. "What—what damned rubbish! Did I leave this room without knowing it, and kill Wainwright for—for no reason at all during forty winks?" He swallowed, and calmed down. "I left the room, sir; about twenty minutes ago to fetch the evening paper from the dining room to do the crossword puzzle!" He tapped it viciously. "Here it is!"

Penbury shrugged his shoulders.

"I should be the last person to refute such an emphatic statement," he said, "but let me suggest that you give the statement to the police with slightly less emphasis. Mr. Smith?"

Monty Smith had followed the conversation anxiously, and he had his story ready. He had rehearsed it three times in his mind, and he was not going to make Mr. Calthrop's mistake. Speaking slowly and carefully—he knew that if he spoke fast he would stutter—he answered.

"This is why I left the room. I suddenly remembered that I'd forgotten to return Mr. Wainwright's key. He'd lent it to me this afternoon, when I lost mine. But when I got as far as the first floor I met Mrs. Mayton, who asked me to help her with the curtain of the landing window. It had come off some of its hooks. I did so and then returned to the drawing room with her. You'll

remember, all of you, that we returned together."

"That's right," nodded Mrs. Mayton. "And the reason *I* went out was to fix the curtain."

Penbury looked at Monty hard.

"What about that key?" he demanded.

"Eh? Oh, of course," jerked Monty. "The curtain put it out of my mind. I came down with it still in my pocket."

"Then you've got it now?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't go up to his room?"

"No! Thank goodness!"

Penbury shrugged his shoulders again. He did not seem satisfied. But he turned now to Miss Wicks, and the old lady inquired, while her needles moved busily.

"My turn?"

"If you'll be so good," answered Penbury. "Just as a matter of form."

"Yes, I quite understand," she replied, smiling. "There's no need to apologize. Well, I left the drawing room to fetch some knitting needles. The steel ones I'm using now. My room, as of course you know, is also on the second floor, the little side-room, and after I'd got the needles I was just about to come down when I heard Mr. Wainwright's cough—"

"What! You heard him cough?" interrupted Penbury. "What time was that?"

"Just before nine, I think it was," said Miss Wicks. "Oh, that irritating cough! How it gets on one's nerves,

doesn't it? Or I should say, how it *did* get on one's nerves. Morning, noon and night. And he wouldn't do anything for it. Enough to send one mad."

She paused. The tense atmosphere grew suddenly tenser.

"Go on," murmured Penbury.

"I'm going on," answered Miss Wicks. "Why not? Your door was open, Mr. Penbury, and I went in to ask if we couldn't do something about it. But you were out. You've just told us where. And suddenly, when I heard Mr. Wainwright coughing again across the passage—that awful clicking sound it always ended with—well, I felt I couldn't stand it any more, and I was knocking at his door almost before I knew it. It was my handkerchief you found in your room, Mr. Penbury. I must have dropped it there."

She paused again. Again Penbury murmured, "Go on."

She turned on him with sudden ferocity. Mr. Calthrop nearly jumped out of his chair. Monty felt perspiration dripping down his neck. Bella twined her fingers together to prevent herself from shrieking. Mrs. Mayton sat rigid.

"Will you stop interrupting?" shouted the old woman.

Penbury moistened his lips. For a few moments Miss Wicks knitted rapidly, the steel points of the needles making the only sound in the room. They seemed to be doing a venomous dance. Then she continued, in a queer hard voice.

"Come in," called Mr. Wainwright. "I'm coming in," I called back. And I went in. And there he stood smiling at me. "You haven't come to complain of my cough again, have you?" he asked. "No," I answered. "I've come to cure it." And I plunged a steel knitting needle into his heart—like this!"

She stretched out a bony hand, and, with amazing strength, stabbed a cushion.

The next instant there came a knocking on the front door.

"The police!" gasped Mr. Calthrop. But no one moved. With tense ears they listened to the maid ascending from the basement, they heard the front door open, they heard footsteps entering. . . .

A moment later they heard Mr. Wainwright's cough.

"Yes, and I heard it when he went out ten minutes ago," smiled Miss Wicks. "But thank you very much indeed; Mr. Penbury. I was as bored as the rest of them."



Samuel Hopkins Adams

The Flying Death

A bizarre and terrifying detective story by one of America's favorite authors—creator of Average Jones, author of REVELRY, THE HARVEY GIRLS, and GRANDFATHER STORIES (published when Mr. Adams was 84, it was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection). "The Flying Death" is a tale of seemingly inexplicable murder, as clever and baffling today as it was 60 (yes!) years ago . . . a tale of the monstrous Lord of the Air.

DOCUMENT No. 1.—A letter of explanation from Harris Haynes, Reporter for the *New Era*, New York, off on Vacation, to his Managing Editor.

MONTAUK POINT, L. I., Sept. 20th, 1902.
MR. JOHN CLARE, Managing Editor,
The *New Era*, New York City.

MY DEAR MR. CLARE,—HERE IS a case for your personal consideration. At present it is—or, at least, it would appear on paper—a bit of pure insanity. Lest you should think it that, and myself the victim, I have two witnesses of character and reputation who will corroborate every fact in the case, and who go farther with the incredible inferences than I can bring myself to do. They are Professor Willis Ravenden, expert in entomology and an enthusiast in every other branch of science, and Stanford Colton, son of old Colton, of the Button Trust, and himself a medical student about to obtain his diploma. Colton, like myself, is recuperating. Professor Ravenden is studying the metamorphosis of a small, sky-blue butterfly

species of insect with a disjointed name which inhabits these parts.

We three constitute the total late-season patronage of Third House, and probably five per cent. of the population of this forty square miles of grassland, the remainder being the men of the Life Saving Service, the farmer families of First, Second, and Third Houses, and a little settlement of fishermen on the Sound side.

This afternoon—yesterday, to be accurate, as it is now past midnight—we three went out for a tramp. On our return we ran into a fine, driving rain that blotted out the landscape. It's no trick at all to get lost in this country, where the hillocks were all hatched out of the same egg and the scrub-oak patches out of the same acorn. For an hour or so we circled around. Then we caught the booming of the surf plainly, and came presently to the crest of the sand-cliff, eighty feet above the beach. As the mist blew away we saw, a few yards out from the cliff's foot and a short distance to

the east, the body of a man lying on the hard sand.

There was something in the huddled posture that struck the eye with a shock as of violence. With every reason for assuming at first sight the body to have been washed up, I somehow knew that the man had not met death by the waves. Where we stood the cliff fell too precipitously to admit of descent, but opposite the body it was lower, and here a ravine cut sharply through a dip between the hills at right angles to the beach. We half fell, half slipped down the cliff, made our way to the gully's opening, and came upon a soft and pebbly beach only a few feet wide, beyond which the hard, clean level of sand stretched to the receding waves. As we reached the open a man appeared around a point to the eastward, saw the body, and broke into a run. Colton had started toward the body, but I called him back. I didn't want the sand marked just then. Keeping close to the cliff's edge, we went forward to meet the man. As soon as he could make himself heard above the surf he hailed us.

"How long has that been there?"

"We've just found it," said Colton, as we turned out toward the sea. "It must have been washed up at high tide."

"I'm the coastguardsman from the Bow Hill Station," said the man.

"We are guests at Third House," said I. "We'll go through with this together."

"Come along, then," said he.

We were now on a line with the body, which lay with the head toward the waves. The coastguardsman suddenly checked his steps and exclaimed, "It's Paul Serdholm." Then he rushed forward with a great cry, "He's been murdered!"

"Oh, surely not murdered," ex-postulated the Professor, nervously. "He's been drowned, and——"

"Drowned!" cried the other. "And how about that gash in the back of his neck? He's the guard from Sand Spit, two miles below. Three hours ago I saw him on the cliff yonder. Since then he's come and gone between here and his station. And——" he gulped suddenly and turned upon us so sharply that the Professor jumped—"what's he met with?"

"The wound might have been made by the surf dashing him on a sharp rock," I suggested.

"No, sir," said the coastguardsman, with emphasis. "The tide ain't this high once in a month. It's murder, that's what it is—foul murder," and he bent over the dead man with twitching shoulders.

"He's right," said Colton, who had been hastily examining the corpse. "This is no drowning case. The man was stabbed and died instantly. Was he a friend of yours?" he asked of the guard.

"No; nor of nobody's, was Paul Serdholm," replied the man. "No later than last week we quarrelled." He paused, looking blankly at us.

"How long would you say he had been dead?" I asked Colton.

"A very few minutes."

"Then get to the top of the cliff and scatter," I said; "the murderer must have escaped that way. From the hilltop you can see the whole country. Keep off that sand, can't you? Make a detour to the gully."

"And what will you do?" inquired Colton, looking at me curiously.

"Stay here and study this out," I replied, in a low tone. "You and the Professor meet me at Sand Spit in half an hour. Guard, if you don't see anything, come back here in fifteen minutes." He hesitated. "I've had ten years' experience in murder cases," I added. "If you will do as you're told for the next few minutes we should clear this thing up."

No sooner had they disappeared on the high ground than I set myself to the solution of the problem. Inland from the body stretched the hard beach. Not one of us had stepped between the body and the soft sand into which the cliff sloped. In this soft, pebbly mass of rubble footprints would be indeterminable. Anywhere else they should stand out like the stamp on a coin. As we approached I had noticed that there were no prints to the east. On the side of the sea there was nothing except numerous faint bird tracks extending almost to the water. Taking off my shoes I followed the spoor of the dead man. It stood out

plain as a poster, to the westward. For a hundred yards I followed it. There was no parallel track. To make certain that his slayer had not crept upon him from that direction, I examined the prints for the marks of superimposed steps. None was there. Three sides, then, were eliminated. My first hasty glance at the sand between the body and the cliff had shown me nothing. Here, however, must be the evidence. Striking off from the dead man's line, I walked out upon the hard surface.

The sand was deeply indented beyond the body, where the three men had hurried across to begin the hunt. But no other footmark broke its evenness. Not until I was almost on a line between the corpse and the mouth of the gully did I find a clue. Clearly imprinted on the clean level was the outline of a huge claw. There were the five talons and the nub of the foot. A little forward and to one side was a similar mark, except that it was slanted differently. Step by step, with starting eyes and shuddering mind, I followed the trail. Then I became aware of a second, confusing the first, the track of the same creature. At first the second track was distinct, then it merged with the first, only to diverge again. In this second series the points of the talons were toward the cliff. From the body to the soft sand stretched the unbroken lines. *Nowhere else within a radius of many yards was there any other indication.* The sand lay blank as a white sheet

of paper; as blank as my mind, which struggled with one stupefying thought—that between the dead life-saver and the refuge of the cliff no creature had passed except one that stalked on monstrous clawed feet!

My first thought was to preserve the evidence for a more careful examination. I hastily collected some flat rocks and had covered those marks nearest the soft sand when I heard a hail. For the present I didn't want the others to know what I had found. I wanted to think it out, undisturbed by conflicting theories. So I hastily returned, and was putting on my shoes when the Bow Hill coastguardsman—his name was Schenck—came out of the gully.

"See anything?" I called.

"Nothing to the northward. Have you found anything?"

"Nothing definite," I replied. "Don't cross the sand there. Keep along down. We'll go to the Sand Spit Station and report this."

But the man was staring out beyond my little column of rock shelters.

"What's that thing?" he said, pointing to the nearest unsheltered print. "Heavens! It looks like a bird track. And it leads straight to the body," he cried, in a voice that jangled on my nerves. But when he began to look fearfully overhead into the gathering darkness, drawing in his shoulders like one shrinking from a blow, that was too much. I jumped to my feet, grabbed him

by the arm, and started him along.

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Keep this to yourself. I won't have a lot of idiots prowling around those tracks. Understand? You're to report this murder and say nothing about what you don't know. Later we'll take it up again."

The man seemed stunned. He walked along quietly, close to me, and it was no comfort to feel him now and again shaken by a violent shudder. We had nearly reached the station when Professor Ravenden and Colton came down to the beach in front of us. But they had nothing to tell.

Before we reached the station I cleared another point to my satisfaction.

"The man wasn't stabbed; he was shot," I said.

"I'll stake my life that's no bullet wound," cried Colton, quickly. "I've seen plenty of shooting cases. The bullet never was cast that made such a gap in a man's head as that. It was a sharp instrument, with power behind it."

"To Mr. Colton's opinion I must add my own for what it is worth," said Professor Ravenden.

"Can you qualify as an expert?" I demanded, with the rudeness of rasped nerves and in some surprise at the tone of certainty in the old boy's voice.

"When in search of a sub-species of the Papilionidae in the Orinoco region," said he, mildly, "my party was attacked by the Indians that in-

fest the river. After we had beaten them off it fell to my lot to attend the wounded. I thus had opportunity to observe the wounds made by their slender spears. The incision under consideration bears a rather striking resemblance to the spear-gashes which I then saw. I may add that I brought away my specimens of Papilionidae intact, although we lost most of our provisions."

"No man has been near enough the spot where Serdholm was struck down to stab him," I said. "Our footprints are plain; so are his. There are no others. The man was shot by someone lying in the gully or on the cliff."

"I'll bet you five hundred to five dollars that the post-mortem doesn't result in the finding of a bullet," cried Colton.

I accepted, and it was agreed that he should stay and report from the post-mortem. At the station I talked with several of the men, and, assuming for the time that the case presented no unusual features of murder, tried to get at some helpful clue. Motive was my first aim. Results were scant. It is true that there was a general dislike of Serdholm, who was a moody and somewhat mysterious character, having come from nobody knew whence. On the other hand, no one had anything serious against him. The four clues that I struck, such as they were, can tabulate briefly:—

(I.) A week ago Serdholm returned from Amagansett with a

bruised face. He had been in a street fight with a local loafer who had attacked him when drunk. Report brought back by one of the farmers that the life-saver beat the other fellow soundly, who went away threatening vengeance. Found out by telephone that the loafer was in Amagansett as late as five o'clock this afternoon.

(II.) Two months ago Serdholm accused a local fisherman of stealing some tobacco. Nothing further since heard of the matter.

(III.) Three weeks ago a stranded juggler and mountebank found his way here and asked aid of Serdholm; claimed to be his cousin. Serdholm sent him away next day. Played some tricks and collected a little money from the men. Serdholm, angry at the jeers of the men about his relative, threw a heavy stick at him, knocking him down. As soon as he was able to walk juggler went away crying. Not since seen.

(IV.) This is the most direct clue for motive and opportunity. Coast-guard Schenck (the man who met us at the scene of the murder) quarrelled with the dead man over the daughter of a farmer, who prefers Schenck. They fought, but were separated. Schenck blacked Serdholm's eye. Serdholm threatened to get square. Schenck cannot prove absolute alibi. His bearing and behaviour, however, are those of an innocent man. Moreover, the knife he carried was too small to have made the wound that killed Serd-

holm. And how could Schenck—or any other man—have stabbed the victim and left no track on the sand? That is the blank wall against which I come at every turn of conjecture.

Professor Ravenden, Schenck, and I started back, we two to Third House, Schenck to his station. Colton remained to wait for the coroner, who had sent word that he would be over as soon as a horse could bring him. As we were parting Schenck said:—

“Gentlemen, I’m afraid there’s likely to be trouble for me over this.”

“It’s quite possible,” I said, “that they may arrest you.”

“Heaven knows I never thought of killing Serdholm or any other man. But I had a grudge against him, and I wasn’t far away when he was killed. The only evidence to clear me is those queer tracks.”

“I shall follow those until they lead me somewhere,” said I, “and I do not myself believe, Schenck, that you had any part in the thing.”

“Thank you,” said the guard. “Good-night.”

Professor Ravenden turned to me as we entered the house.

“Pardon a natural curiosity. Did I understand that there were prints on the sand which might be potentially indicative?”

“Professor Ravenden,” said I, “there is an inexplicable feature to this case. If you’ll come up to my room I should very much like to

draw on your fund of natural history.”

When we were comfortably settled I began.

“Would it be possible for a wandering ostrich or other huge bird, escaped from some zoo, to have made its home here?”

“Scientifically quite possible. May I inquire the purpose of this? Can it be that the tracks referred to by the guard were the cloven hoofprints of——”

“Cloven hoofs!” I cried, in sharp disappointment. “Is there no member of the ostrich family that has claws?”

“None now extant. In the processes of evolution the claws of the ostrich, like its wings, have gradually——”

“Is there any huge-clawed bird large enough and powerful enough to kill a man with a blow of its beak?”

“No, sir,” said the Professor, “I know of no bird which would venture to attack man except the ostrich, emu, or cassowary, and the fighting weapon of this family is the hoof, not the beak. But you will again pardon me if I ask——”

“Professor Ravenden, the only thing that approached Serdholm within striking distance walked on a foot armed with five great claws.” I rapidly sketched on a sheet of paper a rough, but careful, drawing. “And there’s its sign-manual,” I added, pushing it towards him.

Imagination could hardly picture

a more precise, unemotional, and conventionally scientific man than Professor Ravenden. Yet at sight of the paper his eyes sparkled, he half started from his chair, a flush rose in his cheeks, he looked briskly and keenly from the sketch to me, and spoke in a voice that rang with a deep under-thrill of excitement.

"Are you sure, Mr. Haynes—are you quite sure that this is substantially correct?"

"Minor details may be inexact. In all essentials that will correspond to the marks made by a thing that walked from the mouth of the gully to the spot where we found the body, and back again."

Before I had fairly finished the Professor was out of the room. He returned almost immediately with a flat slab of considerable weight. This he laid on the table, and taking my drawing sedulously compared it with an impression, deep-sunken into the slab. For me a single glance was enough. That impression, stamped as it was on my brain, I would have identified as far as the eye could see it.

"That's it," I cried, with the eagerness of triumphant discovery. "The bird from whose foot that cast was made is the thing that killed Serdholm."

"Mr. Haynes," said the entomologist, drily, "this is not a cast."

"Not a cast?" I said, in bewilderment. "What is it, then?"

"It is a rock of the Cretaceous period."

"A rock?" I repeated, dully. "Of what period?"

"The Cretaceous. The creature whose footprint you see there trod that rock when it was soft ooze. That may have been one hundred million years ago. It was at least ten million."

I looked again at the rock, and strange emotions stirred among the roots of my hair.

"Where did you find it?" I asked.

"It formed a part of Mr. Stratton's stone fence. Probably he picked it up in his pasture yonder. The maker of the mark inhabited the island where we now are—this land was then distinct from Long Island—in the incalculably ancient ages."

"What did this bird thing call itself?" I demanded.

"It was not a bird. It was a reptile. Science knows it as the Pteranodon."

"Could it kill a man with its beak?"

"The first man came millions of years later—or so science thinks," said the Professor. "However, primeval man, unarmed, would have fallen an easy prey to so formidable a brute as this. The Pteranodon was a creature of prey," he continued, with an attempt at pedantry which was obviously a ruse to conquer his own excitement. "From what we can reconstruct, a reptile stands forth spreading more than twenty feet of bat-like wings, and bearing a four-foot beak as terrible as a bayonet. This monster was the un-

disputed lord of the air; as dreadful as his cousins of the earth, the Dinosaurs, whose very name carries the significance of terror."

"And you mean to tell me that this billion-years-dead flying sword-fish has flitted out of the darkness of eternity to kill a miserable coast-guard within a hundred miles of New York in the year 1902?" I cried. He had told me nothing of the sort. I didn't want to be told anything of the sort. I wanted reassuring. But I was long past weighing words.

"I have not said so," replied the entomologist, quickly. "But if your diagram is correct, Mr. Haynes—if it is reasonably accurate—I can tell you that no living bird ever made the print which it reproduces, that science knows no five-toed bird and no bird whatsoever of sufficiently formidable beak to kill a man. Furthermore, that the one creature known to science which could make that print, and could slay man or a creature far more powerful than man, is the tiger of the air, the Pteranodon. Probably, however, your natural excitement, due to the distressing circumstances, has led you into error, and your diagram is inaccurate."

"Will you come with me and see?" I demanded.

"Willingly. I shall have to ask your help, however, with the rock."

We got a light, for it was now very dark, and, taking turns with the lantern and the Cretaceous slab

(which hadn't lost any weight with age, by the way), we went direct to the shore and turned westward. Presently a light appeared around the face of the cliff and Colton hailed us. He was on his way back to Third House, but, of course, joined us in our excursion.

I hastily explained to him the matter of the footprints, the diagram, and the fossil marks. "Professor Ravenden would have us believe that Serdholm was killed by a beaked ghoul that lived a hundred million years ago."

"I'll tell you one thing," said Colton, gravely. "He wasn't killed by a bullet. It was a stab wound—a broad-bladed knife or something of that sort, but driven with terrific power. The post-mortem settled that. You lose your bet, Haynes. Why," he cried, suddenly, "if you come to that it wasn't unlike what a heavy, sharp beak would make. But—but—this Pteranodon—is that it? Oh, the deuce! I thought all those Pterano-things were dead and buried before Adam's great-grandfather was a protoplasm."

"Science has assumed that they were extinct," said the Professor. "But a scientific assumption is a mere makeshift, useful only until it is overthrown by new facts. We have prehistoric survivals—the gar of our rivers is unchanged from his ancestors of fifteen million years ago. The creature of the water has endured; why not the creature of the air?"

"Oh, come off," said Colton, seriously. "Where could it live and not have been discovered?"

"Perhaps at the North or South Pole," said the Professor. "Perhaps in the depths of unexplored islands. Or possibly inside the globe. Geographers are accustomed to say loosely that the earth is an open book. Setting aside the exceptions which I have noted, there still remains the interior, as unknown and mysterious as the planets. In its possible vast caverns there may well be reproduced the conditions in which the Pteranodon and its terrific contemporaries found their suitable environment on the earth's surface ages ago."

"Then how would it get out?"

"The violent volcanic disturbances of this summer might have opened an exit. However, I am merely defending the Pteranodon's survival as an interesting possibility. My own belief is that your diagram, Mr. Haynes, is faulty."

"Hold the light here, then," I said, laying down the slab; for we were now at the spot. "I will convince you as to that."

While the Professor held the light I uncovered one of the tracks. A quick exclamation escaped him. He fell on his knees beside the print, and as he compared the today's mark on the sand with the rock print of millions of years ago his breath came hard. When he lifted his head his face was twitching nervously, but his voice was steady.

"I have to ask your pardon, Mr. Haynes," he said. "Your drawing was faithful. The marks are the same."

"But what in Heaven's name does it mean?" cried Colton.

"It means that we are on the verge of the most important discovery of modern times," said the Professor. "Savants have hitherto scouted the suggestions to be deduced from the persistent legend of the roc, and from certain almost universal North American Indian lore, notwithstanding that the theory of some monstrous winged creature widely different from any recognised existing forms is supported by more convincing proofs. In the North of England, in 1844, reputable witnesses found the tracks, after a night's fall of snow, of a creature with a pendent tail, which made flights over houses and other obstructions, leaving a trail much like this before us. There are other corroborative instances of a similar nature. In view of the present evidence I would say that this was unquestionably a Pteranodon, or a descendant little altered, and a very large specimen, as the tracks are distinctly larger than the fossil prints. Gentlemen, I congratulate you both on your part in so epoch-making a discovery."

"Do you expect a sane man to believe this thing?" I demanded.

"That's what I feel," said Colton. "But, on your own showing of the evidence, what else is there to believe?"

"But see here," I expostulated, all the time feeling as if I were arguing in and against a dream. "If this is a *flying* creature, how explain the footprints leading up to Serdholm's body as well as away from it?"

"Owing to its structure," said the Professor, "the Pteranodon could not rapidly rise from the ground in flight. It either sought an acclivity from which to launch itself or ran swiftly along the ground, gathering impetus for a leap into the air with outspread wings. Similarly, in alighting, it probably ran along on its hind feet before coming to a halt. Now, suppose the Pteranodon to be on the cliff's edge, about to start upon its evening flight. Below it appears a man. Its ferocious nature is aroused. Down it swoops, skims swiftly with pattering feet toward him, impales him on its dreadful beak, then returns to climb the cliff and again launch itself for flight."

"If the shore was covered with these footprints," I said vehemently, "I wouldn't believe it. It's too——"

I never finished that sentence. From out of the darkness there came a hoarse cry. Heavy wings beat the air with swift strokes. In that instant panic seized me. I ran for the shelter of the cliff, and after me came Colton. Only the Professor stood his ground, but it was with a tremulous voice that he called to us:

"That was a common marsh or

short-eared owl that arose; the *Asio acciptrinus* is not rare hereabouts. There is nothing further to do tonight, and I believe that we are in some peril in remaining here, as the Pteranodon appears to be nocturnal."

We returned to him ashamed. But all the way home, despite my better sense, I walked under an obsession of terror hovering in the blackness above.

So here is the case as clearly as I can put it. I shall have time to work it out unhampered, as the remoteness of the place is a safeguard so far as news is concerned, and only we three know of the Pteranodon prints.

It seems like a nightmare—formless, meaningless. What you will think of it I can only conjecture. But you must not think that I have lost my senses. I am sane enough; so is Colton; so, to all appearances, is Professor Ravenden. The facts are exactly as I have written them down. I have left no clue untouched thus far. I will stake my life on the absence of footprints. And it all comes down to this, Mr. Clare: Pteranodon or no Pteranodon, as sure as my name is Haynes, the thing that killed Paul Serdholm never walked on human feet.—Very sincerely yours,

HARRIS D. HAYNES.

DOCUMENT No. 2.—Extract from letter written by Stanford Colton to his father, John Colton, Esq., of New York City. Date, September 21st, 4 p.m.

So there, my dear dad, is the case against the Pteranodon. To your hard business sense it will seem a thing for laughter. You wouldn't put a cent in Pteranodon stock on the word of an idealistic, scientific theorist like old Ravenden, backed by a few queer marks on a beach. Very well, neither would I. All the same, I ducked and ran when the owl flapped out from the cliff. And I wonder if you wouldn't have been dragging us to shelter yourself if you had been there.

At six o'clock this morning Haynes woke me out of a troubled dream by walking along the hall.

"Is that you, Haynes?" I called.

"Yes," he said. "I'm off for the beach."

"Wait fifteen minutes and I'll go with you," I suggested.

"If you don't mind, Colton, I'd rather you wouldn't. I want to go over the ground alone first. A good night's rest has scared the Professor's Cretaceous jub-jub bird out of my mental premises."

I was now up and at the door.

"Well, good luck!" I said and for some reason I reached out and shook hands with him.

He looked rather surprised—perhaps just a bit startled—but he only said, "See you in a couple of hours."

Sleep was not for me after that. I tried it, but it was no go. The Stratton family almost expired of amazement when I showed up for seven o'clock breakfast. Half an

hour later I was on the way to find Haynes. I went direct down the beach. Haynes had gone this way before me, as I saw by his tracks. It was a dead-and-alive sort of morning—grey, with a mist that seemed to smother sound as well as sight. I went forward with damped spirits and little heart in the enterprise. As I came to the turn of the cliff that opens up the view down the shore I hallooed for Haynes. No reply came. Again I shouted, and this time, as my call drew no answer, I confess that a clammy feeling of loneliness hastened my steps. I rounded the cliff at a good pace and saw ahead what checked me like a blow.

Almost at the spot where we had found Serdholm a man lay sprawled grotesquely. Though the face was hidden and the posture distorted, I knew him instantly for Haynes, and as instantly knew that he was dead. I went forward to the body, sickening at every step.

Haynes had been struck opposite the gully. The weapon that killed him had been driven with fearful impetus between his ribs, from the back. A dozen staggering prints showed where he had plunged forward before he fell. The heart was touched, and he must have been dead almost on the stroke. His flight was involuntary—the blind, mechanical instinct of escape from death. To one who had seen its like before there was no mistaking that great gash in his back. Haynes had

been killed as Serdholm was. But for what cause? What possible motive of murder could embrace those two who had never known or so much as spoken to each other? No; it was motiveless: the act of a thing without mind, inspired by no motive but the blood-thirst, the passion of slaughter. At that the picture of the Pteranodon, as the Professor had drawn it, took hold of my mind. I ran to the point whence Haynes had staggered. Beginning there, in double line over the clean sand, stretched the grisly track of the talons. *Except for them the sand was untouched.*

Of the formalities that succeeded there is no need to speak; but following what I thought Haynes's method would have been, I investigated the movements of Schenck, the coast-guard, that morning. From six o'clock till eight he was at the station. His alibi is perfect. In the killing of poor Haynes he had no part. That being proved sufficiently establishes his innocence of the Serdholm crime. Both were done by the same murderer.

Professor Ravenden is now fixed in his belief that the Pteranodon, or some little-altered descendant, did the murders. I am struggling not to believe it, yet it lies at the back of all my surmises as a hideous probability. One thing I know, that nothing would tempt me alone upon that beach tonight. Tomorrow morning I shall load my Colt and go down there with the Professor, who

is a game old theorist, and can be counted on to see this through. He is sketching out, this afternoon, a monograph on the survival of the Pteranodon. It will make a stir in the scientific world. Don't be worried about my part in this. I'll be cautious to-morrow. No other news to tell; nothing but this counts.

Your affectionate son,

STANFORD.

DOCUMENT No. 3.—Statement by Stanford Colton regarding his part in the events of the morning of September 22nd, 1902.

On the morning of the day after the killing of Harris Haynes I went to the beach opposite Stony Gully. It was seven o'clock when I reached the point where the bodies were found. Professor Ravenden was to have accompanied me. He had started out while I was at breakfast, however, through a misunderstanding as to time. His route was a roundabout one, bringing him to the spot after my arrival, as will appear in his report. I went directly down the shore. In my belt was a forty-five-calibre revolver.

As I came opposite Stony Gully I carefully examined the sand. The five-taloned tracks were in several places almost as distinct as on the previous day. Fortunately, owing to the scanty population and the slow transmission of news, there had been very few visitors to the scene, and those few had been careful in their movements, so the evidence was not trodden out.

For a closer examination I got down on my hands and knees above one of the tracks. There was the secret, if I could but read it. The mark was in all respects the counterpart of the sketch made by Haynes, and of the impress on the Cretaceous rock of Professor Ravenden. I might have been in that posture two or three minutes, my mind immersed in conjecture. Then I rose, and as I stood and looked down there suddenly flashed into my brain the solution. I started forward to the next mark, and as I advanced something sang in the air behind me. I knew it was some swiftly flying thing; knew in the same agonizing moment that I was doomed; tried to face my death; and then there was a dreadful, grinding shock, a flame tore through my brain, and I fell forward into darkness.

DOCUMENT No. 4.—The explanation by Professor Willis Ravenden, F.R.S., etc., of the events of September 20th, 21st, and 22nd, 1902, surrounding the deaths of Paul Serdholm and Harris Haynes and the striking down of Stanford Colton.

Upon the death of my esteemed young friend, Mr. Haynes, I made minute examination of the vestigia near the body. These were obviously the footprints of the same creature that killed Serdholm, the coast-guard. Not only the measurements and depth of indentation, but the intervals corresponded exactly to those observed in the first investigation. The non-existence of any

known five-toed birds drove me to consideration of other winged creatures, and certainly none may say that, with the evidence on hand, my hypothesis of the survival and reappearance of the Pteranodon was not justified.

Having concluded my examination into the circumstances of Mr. Haynes's death, I returned to Third House and set about embodying the remarkable events in a monograph. In this work I employed the entire afternoon and evening, with the exception of an inconsiderable space devoted to a letter which it seemed proper to write to the afflicted family of Mr. Haynes, and in which I suggested for their comfort the fact that he met his death in the noble cause of scientific investigation. In pursuance of an understanding with Mr. Colton, he and I were to have visited, early on the following morning, the scene of the tragedies. By a misconception of the plan I set out before he left, thinking that he had already gone. My purpose was to proceed to the spot along the cliffs instead of by the beach, this route affording a more favourable view, though an intermittent one, as it presents a succession of smoothly rolling hillocks. Hardly had I left the house when the disturbance of the grasses incidental to my passage put to flight a fine specimen of the *Lycaena pseudargiolus*, whose variations I have been investigating. I had, of course, taken my net with me, partly, indeed, as

a weapon of defence, as the butt is readily detachable and heavily loaded.

In the light of subsequent events I must confess my culpability in allowing even so absorbing an interest as this that suddenly beset my path to turn me from my engagement to meet Mr. Colton. Instinctively, however, I pursued the insect. Although this species, as is well known, exhibits a power of sustained flight possessed by none other of the lepidopterae of corresponding wing area, I hoped that, owing to the chill morning air, this specimen would be readily captured. Provokingly it alighted at short intervals, but on each occasion rose again as I was almost within reach. Thus lured on I described a half-circle and was, approximately, a third of a mile inland when finally I netted my prey on the leaves of a *Quercus ilicifolia*. Having deposited it in the poison jar which I carried on a shoulder-strap, I made haste, not without some quickenings of self-reproach, toward the cliff. Incentive to greater haste was furnished by a fog-bank that was approaching from the south. Heading directly for the nearest point of the cliff, I reached it before the fog arrived. The first object that caught my eyes, as it ranged for the readiest access to the beach, was the outstretched body of Colton lying upon the hard sand where Serdholm and Haynes had met their deaths.

For the moment I was stunned

into inaction. Then came the sense of my own guilt and responsibility. Along the cliff I ran at full speed, dipped down into a hollow, where, for the time, the beach was shut off from view, and surmounted the hill beyond, which brought me almost above the body a little to the east of the gully. The fog, too, had been advancing swiftly, and now as I reached the cliff's edge it spread a grey mantle over the body lying there alone. Already I had reached the head of the gully, when there moved very slowly out upon the hard sand a thing so out of all conception, an apparition so monstrous to the sight, that my net fell from my hand and a loud cry burst from me. In the grey folds of mist it wavered, assuming shapes beyond comprehension. Suddenly it doubled on itself, contracted to a compact mass, underwent a strange inversion, and before my clearing vision there arose a man, dreadful of aspect indeed, but still a human being, and, as such, not beyond human powers to cope with. Coincident with this recognition I noted a knife, inordinately long of blade and bulky of handle, on the sand almost under Colton. Toward this the man had been moving when my cry arrested him, and now he stood facing the height with strained eye and gnashing teeth.

There was no time for delay. The facile descent of the gully was out of the question. It was over the cliff or nothing; for if Colton was alive

his only chance was that I should reach his assailant before the latter could come at the knife. Upon the flash of the thought I was in mid-air, a giddy terror dulling my brain as I plunged down through the fog. Fortunately for me—for the bones of sixty years are brittle—I landed upon a slope of soft sand. Forward I pitched, threw myself completely over, and, carried to my feet by the impetus, ran down the lesser slope upon the man. That he was obsessed by a mania of murder was written on his face and in his eyes. But now his expression, as he turned toward me, was that of a beast alarmed. To hold his attention I shouted. The one desideratum was to reach him before he turned again to the knife and Colton.

The maniac crouched as I ran in upon him, and I must confess to a certain savage exultation as I noted that he had little the advantage of me in size or weight. Although not a large man, I may say that I am of wiry frame, which my out-of-door life has kept in condition. So I felt no great misgivings as to the outcome. We closed. As my opponent's muscles tightened on mine I knew, with a sudden, daunting shock, that I had met the strength of fury. For a moment we strained, I striving for a hold which would enable me to lift him from his feet. Then with a rabid scream the creature dashed his face into my shoulder and bit through shirt and flesh until the teeth grated on my shoulder blade.

Not improbably this saved my life and Colton's. For, upon the outrage of that assault, a fury not less insane than that of my enemy fired me, and I, who have ever practised a certain scientific austerity of emotional life, became a raging beast. Power flashed through every vein; strength distended every muscle. Clutching at the throat of my assailant I tore that hideous face from my shoulder. My right hand, drawn back for a blow, twitched the cord of my heavy poison bottle. Shouting aloud I swung the formidable weapon up and brought it down upon his head with repeated blows. His grasp relaxed. I sprang back for a fuller swing and beat him to the ground. The jar was shattered, but such was my ecstasy of murderousness that I forgot the specimen of *pseudargiolus*, which fell with the fragments and was trodden into the sand.

In my hand I still held the base of the jar. My head was whirling. I staggered backward, and with just sense enough left to know that the deadly fumes of the cyanide were doing their work flung it far away. A mist fell like a curtain somewhere between my eyes and my brain, befogging the processes of thought.

The next thing I knew, I was lying on my back, looking into a white face—Colton's! I must have been saying something, for Colton replied, as if to a question:—

“It's all right, Professor. There's no *pseudargiolus* or *Pteranodon*, or anything. Just lie quiet.”

But it was borne in upon me that I had lost my prize. "Let me up!" I cried. "I've lost it—it fell when the poison jar broke."

"There, there," he said, soothingly, as one calms a delirious person. "Just wait—"

"I'm speaking of my specimen, the *pseudargiolus*." The mist was beginning to lift from my brain, and the mind now swung dizzily back to the great speculation. "The *Pteranodon*?" I gasped.

"There!" Colton laughed shakily as he pointed to the blood-be-smeared form lying quiet on the sand.

"But the footprints! The fossil marks on the rock!"

"Footprints on the rock? Handprints here."

"Handprints!" I repeated. "Tell me slowly. I must confess to a degree of bewilderment to which I am not accustomed."

"No wonder, sir. Here it is. I saw it all just before I was hit. This man is Serdholm's cousin, the juggler. He's crazy, probably from Serdholm's blow. He's evidently been waiting for a chance to kill Serdholm. The gully's mouth is where he

waited. You've seen circus-jugglers throw knives—well, that's the way he killed Serdholm. In his crazy cunning he saw that footprints would give him away, so he utilized another of his circus tricks and recovered the knife by walking on his hands. His handprints are what we mistook for the footprints of a giant, prehistoric bird!"

"But Mr. Haynes? And yourself?"

"I don't know why he wanted to kill us, unless he feared we would discover his secret. I escaped because I was going forward as he threw, and that must have disturbed his aim so that the knife turned in the air and the handle struck me, knocking me senseless."

Here the juggler groaned, and we busied ourselves with bringing him to.

My monograph on the *Pteranodon*, it is hardly needful to state, will not be published. At the same time I maintain that the survival of this formidable creature, while now lacking definite proof, is none the less strictly within the limits of scientific possibility. . . .

WILLIS RAVENDEN.



Selwyn Jepson

Letter of the Law

Agatha Tomlin, the dead woman's companion for 17 years, did not trust Mr. Jarvis, the "man of business." It was his brief case as much as anything which made her distrust him—it looked too rich . . .

MY DEAR MRS. BROWNE: MY TELEGRAM must have been a terrible shock to you, but I dared not let you open your paper tomorrow unprepared and see the story of her dreadful death in bald print. You loved her as much as I did. You were her sister, and I her only companion these seventeen years. In spite of all the people who looked to her for everything, we were the only two who were really in her life and in her devoted heart.

If my writing is more difficult than ever, forgive me. So much happened at once and I am still terribly shaky. But I *had* to write to you as soon as I could pull myself together. You can help me, if you will, by telling me that I did right. Please, if you are not alone, take this letter to your room and lock the door. And of course you will destroy it as soon as you have read it.

It was very difficult up to the moment of decision, but once I was past it, things went fairly easily, and I can still think clearly. I will do my best to write clearly.

How quiet it is! Never to hear her voice again—oh, Mary! Mary! I re-

member when my mother died, and then my father, but it was never as bad as this. Being without home or money, and everyone I had called friend turning their backs on me because I was poor and miserable, she gave me both home and friendship. "Agatha, you shall live with me, and be my companion." I can hear the words as if it were yesterday. It was wonderful! A room of my own again, clothes, money in my pocket. Seventeen years of absolute happiness. If we ever disagreed it was never for more than a few minutes. It was generally that she became impatient with me when I tried to make her see that someone was imposing on her, taking advantage of her generosity. And they did, so often. In her purity of heart she could not understand an evil motive in anyone.

She even thought Mr. Jarvis was an honest man. She could not see that with his round pink face, his blue eyes which never left yours, his soft, quick voice, and his habit of repeating everything at least twice—she could not see that he was a villain. Poor darling, she looked at his black jacket, striped

trousers, and the pearl pin in his black satin tie, and said she had never seen anyone so obviously respectable. Also, because he lived in the flat upstairs, he was a neighbor, and in her philosophy that was enough to make him completely safe and acceptable. In no time she was calling him "my man of business," and thought it so clever of him to be able to conduct his intricate affairs in the city from his own fireside with no more equipment than a brief case full of papers and a telephone. I think it was that brief case as much as anything which made me distrust him. It was of the finest pigskin and had two gold locks with his initials in gold between them. It looked *too* rich, if you see what I mean.

But Mary would not listen. He used to come to tea and sit on the edge of his chair with one of my chocolate cakes in his little fat fingers and tell us how he had made three thousand pounds in half an hour that very day. "It's not really difficult, my dear ladies, not really difficult at all. Judgment, judgment, purely a matter of judgment—"

And within a month Mary had taken her affairs away from Spottiswoode & Evans, and Mr. Jarvis was here to lunch as well as tea at least three times a week. He positively wore out the elevator between the third and fourth floors. Of course, I did not labor the point about not trusting him, directly I realized how much it upset her. Besides, he showed her figures on pieces of blue

paper, ruled this way and that in columns which proved how greatly he had improved her position.

"Twenty-two percent richer than you were a week ago, my dear lady, twenty-two percent. Think of that, think of that!" I had to buy half a dozen bottles of port because he liked a glass after lunch. And a box of cigars. Havanas. You can guess what *they* cost. After lunch there would be a ceremonious signing of papers out of that hateful brief case, and Mary would feel wonderful and important, like a big business woman. The washing-up took me simply ages. He ate such a lot. Greed was his middle name. Only greed could make a man want to rob an old woman of everything she possessed.

For that is what he did. It took six weeks. He showed us how he did it. Absolutely legally. He explained all about the crash of the Arlo Trust, and it was in the papers just as he told us. And on those documents, on the share certificates which were all that was left of Mary's little fortune, was the name of the Arlo Trust, in fine engraved lettering at the top of each, with all the squirlygigs in the world to make it look trustworthy.

Mr. Jarvis did not come to lunch, nor to tea, last week. Nor did he look in even once to see how Mary was feeling—after the appalling shock of discovering that she was penniless, that the allowances to Letty and the Cawfield family must cease, that she could not pay Eileen's fare to Persia to join Roger, that if she

spent any of the money in her current account there would not be enough for next quarter's rent, that apart from the furniture of this flat and a few small pieces of jewelry and the Spode dogs, she had nothing in the world.

She did not speak for hours at a time. She scarcely looked at me—perhaps because she could not bear the pity in my eyes, although the Lord knows I did my best not to show it. Not once did I say, I told you so. I did not even feel it. The thing was too big, too awful. She only made one reference to it after that terrible hour of Mr. Jarvis's last visit. "It isn't for me," she said. "It's on your account, and all the others—those who relied on me. I've let you all down. It wasn't just a mistake. It was vanity." I ran out, down the stairs, not waiting for the elevator, and into the street—because of the tears I couldn't control.

So now, about today. I will keep strictly to the facts. No emotion. I feel all cold inside now, and this pen, these words, seem to belong to someone else.

I went out at a few minutes past ten. I went straight to the post office and drew out three pounds—I have still fifty-two left, so I shall be all right until I can find some sort of job. I did the shopping. I bought a small chicken—a great extravagance, but I hoped to tempt Mary who had not eaten more than a thimbleful of anything for three days—things for a salad, and the bacon

ration, and got back to the flat at eleven, almost to the minute. I took my bag into the kitchen and prepared Mary's tray of cold milk and biscuits, which I knew she would take and so get some nourishment.

She was not waiting in the sitting room and the door of the drawing room was closed—usually we leave it open so that in this hot weather there is a current of air from the windows overlooking the garden. I thought it a little odd that she should have shut herself in the drawing room, but decided she might be lying down on the sofa, even asleep, for when you are sleeping badly—and she had been sleeping scarcely at all—you are apt to feel sleepy and *can* sleep at odd moments. So I opened the drawing-room door very quietly, and saw that I had been right about her being on the sofa. The poor sweet, I thought, so she *is* resting. I was right. But it was her last rest. I saw the little pistol of which I had always been so frightened, glittering on the Bokhara rug just by her right hand, which was hanging down, and the world came to an end for me in a timeless moment of agony. I do not know why I did not drop the tray or scream or faint or do something more dramatic than just standing there like a thing of stone. My hands began to shake, and the glass of milk to jitter and spill, when I moved a few paces farther into the room to make sure.

I backed away and next found myself in the kitchen with the tray still

in my hands. I put the tray down by the sink. I seemed able to think directly my hands were free. I sat in the chair for several minutes, thinking faster and faster, and seeing things so clearly that now when I look back on it after a few hours, I ask myself, was it I? Was it Agatha Tomlin who thought like that, who acted as I acted during the next half-hour or so? It was as though I was the instrument, indeed the willing helper, of someone else in me—someone who had taken complete possession of me. I forgot that by nature I am timid, nervous, uncertain, inclined to need a stronger spirit to lean on. Perhaps it was because that stronger spirit had been taken from me so suddenly that some hidden strength of my own came briefly to my aid—briefly, but it lasted long enough.

I poured the milk back into the bottle and returned it to the refrigerator. I put the biscuits in the tin, rinsed the spilt milk off the plate, dried it, and put it in the rack. It took a great effort to face the drawing room again, but I managed it.

I kissed Mary goodbye—her cheek was still warm and it was difficult to believe that no breath moved between her lips. Apart from that, I did not touch her, difficult as it was not to wipe the blood away from the cruel wound in her temple. I picked up the pistol by the thin end and carried it to the sitting room, closing the door. Before I put it back in its place in the table drawer, I rubbed it hard with my handkerchief.

Then I dialed Mr. Jarvis' number and as soon as I heard his voice, said quickly, "Good morning, Mr. Jarvis. Do you think you could spare a moment to come down? I think Mary would like to see you."

He did not let me get any further, but began at once to say that he was sorry, that he was extremely busy, and would I mind hanging up as he was expecting an important call from the city. "But I am sure you can help her—" I began again.

"I've explained the whole lamentable situation several times to her, several times—it can serve no good purpose to do so again. Tell her I'm very sorry, very sorry!" And he rang off.

I sat for a moment and then tried again, but he no sooner heard my voice than he cut me off.

At the same moment the front doorbell rang and very nearly stopped my heart. I had no idea who it could be, and I was in two minds whether to answer it. Then I realized that I would have to. Luckily it turned out all right, except that it was very distressing to see Eileen's tear-stained face and hear her broken-hearted disappointment about not being able to go out to Persia. Mary must have written to her yesterday, telling her about there being no money, and she had hurried up from Farnham directly she got the letter.

"But, Agatha, what's *happened?*" She waved the letter at me. "How can Aunt have lost it all?"

I told her that Mary had had very bad advice about her investments. Of course, she wanted to know all about it, to see her. Aunt and perhaps persuade her to let her have something, even a little, towards her fare. I said Mary was resting, that she was still terribly upset, that I dared not let her talk about it any more. And then I added that she was saving herself for an interview with the man who had advised her so badly. "What she should do," Eileen said, in that fierce way of hers, "is go straight to the police. I'm sure she's been swindled." And I said that that was exactly what I thought, and it might indeed become a police matter. "Then there's *some* hope," Eileen brightened a little, and then, to my relief, said she would leave it to me to see what could be done.

I waited until I heard the elevator going down with her, and then making sure I had my key for getting in again, went up the stairs to the next floor. No one was about, and no one saw me at Mr. Jarvis' door.

As soon as he opened it I stepped onto the mat and said, "Please, please, Mr. Jarvis, you must see her! She needs you!"

"I can do nothing, nothing! This is outrageous! You're interrupting me at a vital moment. I was deeply involved myself in this disastrous business, and I must recoup, must recoup." And he tried to shut the door, but I was still half-inside.

"Oh, well," I said quickly, "if you

won't help her, you won't, but who is there to advise her if you don't? That bank manager of hers is no use at all. And the legacy is so much bigger than she ever thought it would be."

"Bank managers are very good fellows, good fellows, they—" He pulled himself up; coughed, and went on, "Yes, indeed, they are—but very conservative, very. Legacy did you say?" His little round eyes went all about me, as if he dared not let me see into them.

"I thought," I said, "that Mary mentioned it to you. Her brother died last May."

"I seem to remember she said something about a recent bereavement, but—er—how much larger—I mean—if there's any sizable sum—possibilities, you know—"

"No, never mind," I said, and stepped back into the corridor. "I shouldn't have interfered. After all, it's no business of mine. You're busy. I don't want to be responsible—"

I turned and went towards the stairs, managing somehow not to look back. I reached the flat and closed the door, listening, waiting, praying. Then at last I heard him on the other side, his snuffling, Pekinesey breathing, as he prepared himself, rehearsed his expression. After several seconds the bell rang. I did not open the door too quickly. When I did, I looked surprised. "Oh, you shouldn't have come. You'll miss that telephone call."

"When a friend is in need," he said smoothly, "I'm not the man to think of myself—no, not the man. It was selfish of me even to hesitate. Where's the dear lady?" He peered past me.

"Lying down," I said, letting him in and allowing him to follow me into the sitting room. "She's in the drawing room."

He looked across at the closed door, his mouth moist and the blue eyes naked. I thought of a wasp—how its head will go on eating when its body has been severed.

I stood the other side of the table from him. "Sit down, Mr. Jarvis. There's just one thing I must ask you before you see her."

"Of course, dear lady." He sat down and fished out a cigar to cover his impatience and began to prepare it for lighting.

"You were on the Board of the Arlo Trust, weren't you?"

"Yes, indeed. But I resigned three months ago. Too many other interests. I think I explained. A great pity. If I'd been there today—ah—well!"

"I'm a foolish old woman, Mr. Jarvis, and know nothing of these things, but Mary was puzzled about why all the shares had to be in your name instead of hers."

He looked suddenly doubtful, as though he had met a stone among the cake currants.

"I explained that too, to everybody's satisfaction I should have thought, everybody's. How could I

act quickly, with decision, at a second's notice, if I had to come running down each time for a signature?"

I pulled open the table-drawer, with the pistol lying there, and looked down at it.

"It's a pity you didn't act quickly, before the shares fell from eighteen shillings to ninepence in one morning," I said. "But perhaps you did—the day before!"

"That's a very libelous statement," he said, and I knew immediately that it was true. "Let me tell you," he went on, "that anyone can make an error of judgment. The best of us, and I'm only human. But this has been gone over before. Your mistress fully understood."

"My mistress—yes. And my only friend," I heard myself say. I was still looking into the drawer.

"If I'm to see her," he began briskly, "it must be now. You say she wishes to discuss the problems of this legacy, the possibility, no doubt, that we might recoup our fortunes together, eh? Recoup—*What's that you've got there?*"

He had obeyed an instinctive curiosity to move closer to see what it was I was looking at. "If anyone harmed her," I said slowly, "I think I would kill him."

He did the only possible thing he could do. He grabbed the pistol from the drawer.

"It's loaded," I said. "It's been there all the time I've lived here."

"I daresay it has. And I daresay

it's a souvenir from two wars ago and there isn't a license for it. All the same, I think it would be safer with me." He put it in his pocket with a masterful air.

"Forgive me," I said. "It's only that I love her so."

"If you love her so," he said nastily, "you'll take me to her and stop wasting my time."

"Yes," I said. "I'll take you to her."

I opened the drawing-room door and he went in with his face fixed in that open, friendly, confidence-inspiring expression which was supposed to disguise the greed with which his soul was so rotten.

The moment he was inside the drawing room I shut the door and turned the key in the lock. I picked up the cigar from where he had left it in an ashtray, on the sitting-room table, and threw it out of the window on my way to the telephone. I heard him cry out in horror and alarm as I put my finger in the hole marked 9 on the dial, and I had swung it three times before he reached the door and tried the knob. "Emergency," said a cool efficient voice. "Police!" I said. "Someone has been shot!"

I gave the address quickly. They took it down. I did not say it was murder. They would decide that for themselves when they came. I put down the receiver. Mr. Jarvis was shouting to me from inside the drawing room to unlock the door. I sat quite still until I remembered that

someone would have to open the front door for the police; so I opened the front door and leaned against the wall outside, rather than go back into the sitting room and hear that frenzied man beating on the inside of the drawing-room door. It was just as well, because one of the bullets he fired into the lock in an attempt to break it might easily have hit me. I had a wicked feeling of triumph when he shot at the lock, because I knew it would settle the question of fingerprints on the pistol—they would be in the right places, wouldn't they?

The police came and took him away. They said I had shown great presence of mind in locking the door on the murderer and dialing 999, and that I shall have to be a witness. When they asked me why he had done it, I said I didn't know, but I thought Mary had had a notion to go to the police about some business matter he did not want investigated. "Ah," they said. "Well, it'll be investigated now, all right."

And so there it is, Mrs. Browne. That is what happened, and I am sure you will agree with me that it was the right thing for me to have done. I don't say your sister would altogether have approved, but it was a moment—the last and only time—when someone could take responsibility without consulting her. God rest her beloved soul. And Mr. Jarvis', I suppose.

Yours sincerely,

AGATHA TOMLIN

Irvin S. Cobb

The Darkest Closet

Irvin S. Cobb, famous as a humorist, was wryly unhumorous when he wrote short stories of crime. His finest book in the mystery field, FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY, is now a neglected, almost forgotten, cornerstone. And his detective stories about Old Judge Priest, that lovable Kentuckian with his "dry humor and rich humanity," are also unhonored and unsung . . . Here is Old Judge Priest, detecting to the hilt, in one of Irvin S. Cobb's best short novels.

REELFOOT LAKE IS THE LARGEST freshwater lake south of the Ohio River. It is the weirdest and the strangest, the most mysterious and the most sinister. Also, it's the newest. It was created by the great earthquakes of 1811.

There was one shock that shifted the course of the Mississippi River, and that must have been some shift. There came a second which practically made over the Madrid Bend country of west Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky. Then there was a third which crumpled down and depressed an area roughly sixty-five miles in length and of an average width of about seventy miles. The same shock split a fissure through to the Mississippi, so that for three days the Mississippi ran north through the funnel, to fill up that gaping hollow and overflow the sunken lands bordering it. In Reelfoot there are stretches where on still, cloudless days a man in a boat, peering downward into the saffron

depths, can see the slime-festooned upper boughs of drowned trees still standing and staunch after more than a century.

There are other places, deeper still, and by local belief these spots mark the mouths of subterranean tunnels and passages by which the great carrion-loving gars and catfish may go out to the river and back again, regardless of water levels above.

Before now, bloody things and tragic things have come to pass here, and it was here, a few years back, that there came to pass a tragedy which is the cause and the excuse for this story's being written, the story, in short, of a certain elderly Kentuckian's first appearance as an amateur detective. Considerably more than a decade later he would take on the same calling, temporarily, but this prior business signified his dedicatory performance in the role.

Properly, the story begins, not by

the pumpkin-colored waters of Reelfoot nor upon its reedy margins, but somewhat farther north of that grim theater, under the roof of the ancient courthouse in the ancient town where for so long Circuit Judge William Pitman Priest reigned as a benevolent despot over a generally satisfied constituency.

It was one of those flawless, cool-warm days of early October when the Southern summer is putting on flaunting colors. The busy sweet-gum, which reared almost against the north wall of the old courthouse, was shaking a cosmetic bough, all purple and scarlet and weathered green, in at the near-most raised window, as Judge Priest came and stood on the threshold of his private chamber opening off the courtroom proper.

Here was where, for going on forty years now, he had presided over Circuit Court. But this afternoon County Court was in session. County Judge Dyke being ill, Major Randolph Pitman was sitting in his stead by temporary appointment. Major Pitman was one of the younger members of the home bar, a veteran of World War I, one stiffened arm attesting that his had been active service. He likewise was Judge Priest's nephew, in whom the old man was well pleased.

Perhaps a desire to see how his kinsman would acquit himself in the judicial capacity had drawn the uncle to the doorway flanking the

bench. Certainly it could not have been any deep regard for the barrister in the case that had brought him hither. Of all the lawyers in town the Honorable Horace Maydew, former state senator, was the only one not on friendly terms with Judge Priest.

This ambitious gentleman was seated between his two clients, one a pretty, slender girl in her later teens, and the other a plumpish woman who, you would have said offhand, was in the early forties; and both of them were dressed in all-black. The right hand of the woman was clumped in surgical bandages. Mr. Maydew stood up now and cleared his throat. He had a fine sonorous voice to match his majestic presence.

"May it please Your Honor," he said, "under ordinary conditions this proceeding would mean merely the presenting of an uncontested will for probate. But, because of certain prior history in connection with it, I have felt it my bounden duty, as the legal representative of these heirs-at-law, to crave the indulgence of this court whilst I rehearse briefly the admitted facts and file certain sworn and attested statements pertaining to same. I shall endeavor to be brief."

But he didn't in the least suggest a man who intended to be brief. He went on: "As is known to all within the sound of my voice, the Carmichaels at one time formed a large and influential connection in this coun-

ty; but of late years there remained but one resident member of that sturdy stock, namely, Elijah Carmichael, living at the family home- stead three miles from this city on the Concord turnpike. Almost two months ago, on August twenty-first, he peacefully expired at the age of seventy-four. The estate, under the law, descended in equal parts to his surviving next of kin, of whom there proved to be but two—namely, his much younger half-brother, Caleb Carmichael, Esquire, and his niece, Miss Juliet Blair, the only child of decedent's deceased half-sister.

"No difficulty was experienced in finding the junior heir. She is here today." With a sweeping gesture he indicated the girl. "But some days passed before the executors succeeded in discovering the whereabouts of the other legal legatee.

"He left here with his parents at the age of eleven years and never once thereafter returned. We trace his career intermittently. We know that as a very young man he studied surgery at a medical college in the city of Philadelphia, but—ahem—never completed his professional education. Thereafter we hear of him under his stage name of Carey Carr, as connected with carnivals, with vaudeville entertainment, with other forms of amusement—in short, a strolling player. It would also appear that some twelve years ago he contracted a matrimonial alliance with a Miss Martha Swopes, originally of Keokuk, Iowa.

"Being at length traced to the city of Houston, Texas; he was informed of the demise of his half-brother and of his own good fortune. Immediately, as he wrote, he made plans for returning here. In that same letter he announced that he would be accompanied by his wife. Needless to add, I refer to this lady who sits at my right.

"Four weeks ago the couple started on their trip hither in their own car. Shortly after leaving Memphis, Tennessee, the husband recalled that their route would take them almost past Reelfoot Lake. Accordingly, he suggested they detour a short distance in order that he might show his wife the scene of his joyous boyhood experiences. His spouse acquiescing, they left the main highway and followed a side road until they reached a gloomy depth known as the Big Hole.

"Our travelers had halted their car upon the low bluff immediately adjacent to this spot and, by the testimony of the survivor, were standing side by side upon the edge contemplating the somber prospect, when, without warning, the husband staggered, presumably from a cerebral stroke or sudden spasm of faintness, and in the same breath fell forward and was precipitated headfirst into the murky waters below.

"For some time — just how long a time she herself does not recall—his desolated companion remained upon the scene vainly hoping

against hope for signs of him. At length, filled with grief and horror, she quit that grim vista, seeking help. In the natural distress of such a moment she accidentally slammed the car door, badly mangling her right thumb, but she drove as best she could to the nearest human habitation some miles away and there gave the alarm. Being assured that days or even weeks must elapse before the remains were borne to the surface, she hurried on to this city.

"At once then it developed that on the eve of their simple wedding twelve years previously, Caleb Carmichael and the then Martha Swopes had entered into certain prenuptial arrangements. Two life insurance policies were taken out, whereby either party was insured for the sum of \$5,000 in favor of the other. Likewise each wrote a will identical in its provisions, under the terms of which, in the event of the signer's death, the survivor would become the sole possessor of whatsoever property the decedent might possess at date of death.

"The baring of these facts created new and unexpected factors. Instead of arriving here as a prospective future resident, this lady now appears as her late husband's chosen inheritor and beneficiary, and therefore entitled to that one-half interest in an estate which, had he lived a few days longer, would have been awarded him as a co-heir of his half-brother, Elijah."

Here, for a short but dramatic space, Mr. Maydew paused. Before resuming, he glanced downward at the funereal shape at his side. The widow's somewhat narrow face, with its rather wide but shapely mouth, its deep-set eyes, its firm yet not angular chin, remained a serious, almost austere mask. Only by a fumbling with her right hand at the button fastenings of the light, crepelike coat which she wore over a black silk blouse did she betray any suggestion of inner stress.

From his post at the doorway where he fronted the room, Judge Priest gave an involuntary start—a little start which no one there heeded—and, behind his glasses, his faded blue eyes began squinting hard at something, some motion, some shape, which for him all of a sudden had become overwhelmingly absorbing.

"Meanwhile," resumed the orator, "watch was being maintained at the place of Mr. Caleb Carmichael's untimely taking-off. Eleven days elapsed after that sad event before the body was—ahem—by natural forces projected from its watery entombment. Because of the elements and the inevitable processes of decay and—hum, ahem—other causes, the remains had undergone changes melancholy to contemplate.

"Fortunately, however, for our purposes a proper and complete identity was readily established. Not only did the body correspond

in general size to the living form of the deceased; not only did the garments still adhering to it answer to the description given by disinterested witnesses at various points as being those worn on his journey northward; but absolutely indisputable proof was found—a removable plate or bridge intended for wear in the lower rear jaw and consisting mainly of three false teeth, which was immediately recognized by its original designer, Dr. P. J. Hooks, of Vicksburg, Mississippi, as being the same which some years ago he made for Caleb Carmichael.

"On such an array of incontrovertible evidence a coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the obvious facts; and, furthermore, the representative of the insurance company, here present, promptly waived any further investigation, and so reported to his home office, with the result that only this morning the widow received a certified check for the full amount of the policy in force on her husband's life at the time of his demise.

"Without further ado, then, the corpse was brought to our fair city and reverently interred in the family vault of the Carmichael family at Elm Grove Cemetery.

"My narrative being practically at an end, I therefore would move the court as follows: First, that the last will and testament of the late Caleb Carmichael be admitted to probatē. Second, that the public

administrator be instructed to take the necessary steps for a prompt and equitable distribution of the estate of the late Elijah Carmichael to my clients, Mrs. Martha Swopes Carmichael and Miss Juliet Blair. Third, since the junior heir still lacks some three months of attaining her majority, and being in the eyes of the law yet an infant, I move that for the brief space of the interim a guardian for her shall be appointed by this honorable court.

"As a preliminary to such recommendation I now offer for the official transcript sundry documents."

He fumbled in a leather manuscript case and produced quite a sheaf of folded, official-looking papers, together with some cardboard oblongs.

"Among other things, I have here," he said, "a true copy of the birth certificate of Martha Swopes, born at Denver, Colorado, June 18, 1884, together with an attested copy of the marriage license issued to the said Martha Swopes and Caleb Carmichael. I also have here an affidavit recently given by Dr. P. J. Hooks, the previously mentioned dentist of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and with it a transcript of the proceedings of the coroner's jury lately sitting at the nearby city of Fulvin in this state. And finally, I have here the original of the aforesaid will of the late Caleb Carmichael, a will done in the testator's handwriting and without the signatures of witnesses, but admissi-

ble to probate under our Kentucky statutes, since the body of the text and the signature have been identified as his handwriting by the widow, and likewise by comparison with these several accompanying manuscripts—notes, memoranda, etc.—done in longhand by him, found among his personal effects."

Making the items into a compact bundle, Mr. Maydew handed them to the county clerk, who in turn deposited them on the desk before the acting county judge.

"Counsel would appear to have been diligent in behalf of his clients," stated His Honor. "There remains, I take it, only the detail of naming for Miss Juliet Blair, here present, a suitable guardian to protect and conserve her interests, and I therefore—"

The sentence was never finished. From his immediate left there came a choked, gurgling outcry. Major Pitman swung about in his chair.

Judge Priest was swaying in the doorway, his face swollen and convulsed. As half a dozen men sprang toward him, he collapsed face downward on the floor.

They carried him back into his private quarters and laid him on a sofa, and County Court adjourned, with the business before it unfinished. Meanwhile the sufferer had recovered his senses. Somebody naturally had suggested running for a physician. At that the invalid seemed to rally, and in a faint, piping voice spoke out:

"Git Lew Lake," he wheezed. "He looked after me a while back when I had one of these here swoundin' spells." In a lower tone he whispered to his nephew, "And say, son, have somebody telephone out to my house fur Jeff Poindexter, and shoo everybody out of here."

His lids drooped wearily and he lay like one sorely spent as presently Dr. Lake entered, hiding his woe beneath a manner that was gruff.

"He just went down as though lightning had struck him," began Major Pitman. "It's the first I knew of it, but he says you attended him once before when he had a similar attack."

"He's a liar, then," snorted the old physician. "Billy Priest," he demanded, "what are you up to now, scaring everybody around here half to death?"

Behind him, Major Pitman goggled in astonishment. The invalid was favoring both of them with a slow, crafty wink.

"Uncle Billy, are you all right?" he cried.

"No, I ain't," answered his uncle. "In addition to bein' somewhat shook up, I got an awful hard crack on my elbow ag'inst that hard floor." He lifted his head, then dropped it again. "Air you shore that door is closed? Well, lock it, and pull down both winder curtains yonder. I'm about to set up."

His famous temper bursting out through all his visible pores, Dr.

Lake glowered down at his friend. "You fraud, what's the meaning of this infernal play-acting?"

"Lew," confessed the malingerer, "I couldn't think of ary other way of breakin' off the proceedin's without creatin' apprehension in certain quarters." He turned his look upon Major Pitman. "About one more minute, son, and you'd have admitted that there will to probate, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course—but why—?"

"Well, ez it is, we've got an excuse fur a few days' delay, and ef it should turn out I'm wrong, then the order kin be signed and there's no damage done."

"But what was it you saw or heard that nobody else there could see or hear?" asked the major.

"I ain't absolutely shore I did see anything. You'll have to put your trust in me and lend me some aid, both of you."

"We'll help. But what is it you think you sensed? Fraud—collusion?"

"I ain't mentioned nary one of those harsh terms. I'll give you a hint: Don't it seem likely to you that possibly too much's been took for granted in this here matter?"

"But the insurance investigator looked into everything, remember, and he professed to be entirely satisfied."

"Even so, ef nobody objects, I'll keep broodin', off and on. . . . Listen, son, did it ever occur to you that nobody ain't seen fit to probe

very deep into the widow's standin'? Whut I'm tryin' to git at is that the only existin' identification of her is the one which she herself offers."

"How about the certified copy of her birth certificate? Surely you don't think that could be a forgery?"

"I do not. I take it that it's the genuine article, even though it mout 'a' passed into the hands of, let's say, an impostor. But it dates back forty-odd years."

"Well, then, the marriage license and the two wills—hers and his?"

"Both twelve years old. Whut about sence then?"

"Why, the two photographs."

"Whut two photographs?"

"The two in the file that Maydew tendered a few minutes ago."

"Oh! Fetch 'em in, then, and let's have a look. Better fetch the whole batch in whilst you're about it."

The old man carefully studied the cabinet-sized prints which Major Pitman handed him. He turned them, reading the printed inscriptions on the backs. His scrutiny over, Judge Priest grunted: "Humph! These air indubitably likenesses of the widow. Kinder dressy, not to say stylish in former days, wuzn't she? Plenty of long hair, too, judgin' by the way it's piled up."

"Plenty of long hair yet, unless it's a wig she wears."

"I hardly think it's a wig. I studied her right close't, today. I'd guess offhand that all that there mess of hair is growin' out of her

own scalp. . . . Say, son; how did these pictures come to be offered, anyway?"

"I might make a few inquiries, but, whether she did or not, Maydew approved of it. He said the girl, Juliet Blair, received them in a letter from her aunt-in-law right after word had reached the Caleb Carmichaels down in Texas that Caleb's half-brother was dead and had left him a pile."

"So the girl got them before the drowndin' and not afterwards?"

"Weeks before! The lady said in the letter she looked forward to meeting her little niece by marriage, and in advance wanted to have her see how she looked. So that would seem to dispose of any doubt as to her being what she says she is."

"Seems so. Son, by any chance is that there letter also in Maydew's handy little budget?"

As Major Pitman searched, his senior absent-mindedly slid the two photographs into a breast pocket of his coat.

"I don't find it," said Pitman. "Well, Uncle-Billy, are you satisfied that this thing was a false alarm on your part?"

"On the contrary, son, the possible complicatedness of it 'pears to me to be pilin' up thicker'n ever."

"Well, suh, in that case I'm agreeable to doing whatever you want done."

"Here's what I want both of you to do: Randy, I want you to put all these here papers in a secure safe

place of keepin' and leave 'em there whilst you're away."

"Away? Where? And why?"

"Away lookin' after your pore old stricken uncle. And right there is where you come into the picture, Lew Lake. It'll be your job to give it out that ownin' to my sudden illness, you've ordered me to leave fur a few days' complete rest at Hot Springs, Arkansaw."

"Ah, indeed!" His old comrade's note was sarcastic. "So I'm to perjure myself—"

"You air! Better fix it fur tomorrow mornin' early—the southbound Cannonball out of here: Because tonight at my house I aim to have a confab with little Julie Blair. I'm lookin' to you, boy, to see to it that she gits in and out of my place without anybody bein' the wiser."

"I'll try. How long will we be gone?"

"Not very long, I hope. We'll start off like we wuz headin' fur Hot Springs, but I reckin neither one of us won't actually ever git there."

"But won't Hod Maydew raise Cain about my going away without acting on his application to probate?"

"Let him sweat. Kin he hold it ag'inst you that in the hurry of gettin' off with your venerable and infirm relative you plumb forgot to pass on this motion?"

"But suppose he goes to Judge Dyke out at his house and asks for an order?"

"Poor old Dyke ain't in shape to

do any supersedin'. Word I got to-day is he's out of his head and sinkin' fast. Besides, even ef he did rally, how could they probate a will that's locked up in the old wall-safe of mine yonder, and me the only man who knows the combination?"

"Oh, I see."

"Glad you're beginnin' to—Who's that hammerin' at the door? Must be Jeff. Let him in, but not anybody else. Oh, Randy—" his tone was casual—"how long after them there Germans winged you did it take you to git used to bein' left-handed?"

"I'm not used to it yet. I'm still awkward when it comes to wrestling with things like shirtstuds." The major glanced down at his permanently skewed arm.

"Ah, hah. . . . Well, I s'pose it would take time." He addressed Dr. Lake: "Say, Lew, how air you on autopsies?"

"I've performed plenty of them in my time, if that's what you mean."

"And whut about little jobs of secret grave-robbin'?"

From the old physician the hot words popped like popcorn: "First, by gum, you ask me to risk my professional reputation by lying. And now you suggest that I begin flirting with the penitentiary—"

"Wait a minute." It was the youngest man breaking in now: "Uncle Billy, what's to hinder you from giving an order for the exhumation of that body?"

"And if I wuz wrong, would Hod

Maydew ever git through snickerin'? Think I'd want to be the laughin' stock of the whole district because I'd went off half-cocked?" Judge Priest stood up. "Randy, you better support me on one side and, Jeff, you git on the other. And don't furgit, anybody, that you-all air easin' along a mouty feebled-up wreck of a human shell."

His feet dragging, his hands fumbling weakly, and his head lolling, the invalid traveled down the courthouse steps and on to the rusty car awaiting him at the curbstone. Spectators scattered to spread the latest bulletin: Judge Priest must be awful bad off; he certainly looked it.

He still looked it that evening as he sat, all bundled up, in the front room of his old house out on Clay Street, for his interview with the girl, Juliet Blair. Now here, Judge Priest decided, was a girl not especially bright but sweet and biddable . . . if anything, just a little bit too biddable.

"Was there—is there anything wrong, suh?" she was saying.

"Whut ever made you think that, honey?" he countered.

"Well, Major Pitman slipping me in by the back way. And both of you telling me not to say anything to anybody."

"Oh, that! Well, I'll tell you about that: Your lawyer, Horace Maydew, Esquire, ain't so very friendly towards me. You see, child, I knowed your folks frum who laid the rail. I reckon it wuz largely my

fault I didn't keep better track of you after most of your family died off."

"Thank you, suh." She had gracious, simple manners. "Well, you couldn't blame yourself. I haven't lived here since I was a little girl."

"So I gethered. Whut've you been doin' with yourself?"

"I grew up at Farndale, out in Bland County, and after Mamma died I managed to finish high school, and then I started clerking in a general store there. I quit when my uncle died and left me this money. I hardly knew him, even."

"Hardly anybody knew him much, without it wuz those two decrepit old servants out on the home place, and one of them deaf and dumb besides. You ain't stayin' out there, by any chance?"

"Oh, no, suh! I'm at Mrs. Broderick's boarding house down on Franklin Street."

"Tell me, have you seen very much of this aunt-in-law sence she arrived?"

"Not so very much. She's sort of—sort of standoffish. She never offers to kiss me—just shakes hands."

"I'd gamble there's somebody else would hanker to kiss a purty little trick like you?"

She flushed, and he knew the shot had registered. She hastened to get back on a less intimate track: "She's nice, though. She wrote me an awfully friendly letter before she started for here on the trip that turned out so terribly."

"Is that so? I s'pose you've still got it?"

"No, suh. Almost as soon as we'd met she asked me to give it back to her, along with two pictures of her that she'd sent me at the same time. She said something about it maybe being needed for evidence—something like that. And only yesterday she told me she must have mislaid the letter or lost it, or something."

"Remember anything particular about the writin'?"

"Well, I do remember the letters didn't slant the regular way."

"Sort of backhanded, eh?"

"No, not leaning, exactly—just more straight-up-and-down."

"Well, nearly all of us have our own special little tricks when it comes to takin' pen in hand. And so you're gettin' along fust-rate with this new relative of yours?"

"Just fine, what little I see of her. She stays to herself a lot. But she's mighty considerate—generous, too. Why, Judge Priest, almost the first thing she said to me was that just as soon as this estate was settled up she wanted to take me around the world with her."

"Travel's a great thing. . . . But look here, whut's that sweetheart of yours goin' to say to your traipsin' off like that?"

"Oh, you mean Tom Ackers? I guess I'll know how to handle him."

"I reckon you will. I seem to recall frum my own youth that most good-lookin' young girls 'pear to come by the gift naturally. Say, look here,

honey, want to do me a favor?"

"If I can."

"Well, then, promise you won't make any plans about goin' away anywhere until we've had a chance to thresh it all out together. I'm leavin' here early in the mornin', but I don't aim to be gone very long; so, till I git back, after that, the bargain stands, eh?"

"Yes, suh, and thank you for your interest. I hope you come back feeling ever so much better."

"Honey," he said with sincerity, "I've got a premonition that practically ez soon ez I git away, I'm goin' to start feelin' and actin' a heap stronger. Jest seein' you has holpen me a lot."

Judge Priest proved himself a true prophet. For, while he still swayed like a dizzy pachyderm as Major Pitman and Jeff Poindexter eased him aboard the southbound flier in the before-sunup gloom of that next morning, he regained a measure of his customary spryness almost immediately after he got off two hours later at a junction town which straddled the state line. Major Pitman stayed aboard. He went on to New Orleans and changed cars there for Houston.

Since the judge was known to people nearly everywhere in that end of the state, he made himself shrinking and inconspicuous in the shadow of a freight shed until Jeff, having gone up the street, presently came back with a hired livery rig.

For most of the forenoon the con-

valescent and Jeff jogged through the gloriously tinted woods. Before noon, they stopped at a double log cabin, where the old man was immediately in confab with a bewhiskered low-lander. This person's tongue was as nimble as his bodily movements were slow.

"Yas, suh," he stated. "That day of the drowndin', I seen this here couple lumber past here. I wuz settin' yonder, and I noticed they wuz totin' a terrible big load of plunder with 'em."

"About whut time of day?"

"I kin fix it mighty nigh to the minute. Uncle Gippy Saunders, that drives the free delivery route, wuz just comin' in sight, and, rain or shine, he's due past here at two-twelve. . . . Well, I jest set here, and about four-fifteen their car came humpin' back."

"Whut makes you sure it wuz around four o'clock?"

"I got you ag'in there, suh. My chillen wuz jest climbin' over the yard fence, comin' from school; and school lets out at four and it takes 'em a kimp quarter of an hour to git home, cuttin' across lots. . . . So the car come along—jest the woman in it now—and she stopped right about where you air now, and yelled out kind of shrill. One end of one thumb wuz mashed mighty nigh to a pulp, seemed like. She says she's lookin' fur help on account of her husband gittin' hisse'f drownded."

"Jest a second: How fur is the lake frum here?"

"Not more'n two long miles—mebbe a quarter further on to the Big Hole."

"About how long would it take the average car to drive frum here to there and back ag'in to here?"

"Thirty minutes at the most."

"Did she mention how soon it wuz after they got to the lake before the drownin' took place?"

"'Right away,' she said. "So right off I ast her whut she'd been doin' all the meantime, and she said she wuz so upset and excited she couldn't rightly say. Well, she'd cammed down considerable by the time she got back here with the sorry news. I'll say that fur the lady."

"Quite so. And whut did you do?"

"Well, fust off I set my biggest boy and my least one on mules and sent 'em to git fellers started draggin' the Big Hole. And then I climbed in 'longside her and showed her the way to old Doc Townsend's. And I left her there, and when I got back it wuz comin' on dark."

"So you didn't see her after that?"

"Not a minute frum that hour to this." To the languid speaker came an idea: "Say, mister, whut-all interest have you got in this here matter?"

"I'm a lawyer by profession," explained Judge Priest.

"I see. I heard tell there wuz a heap of money involved. Say, that there pair shore traveled with a big

store of bag and baggin', ez the feller sez. Besides bundles and grip sacks and two kinds of little squeezed-in trunks, hitched on the runnin' boards, the whole back end of that kivered car wuz loaded halfway to the roof. I remember a couple of these here leather boxes like you'd carry brass-band horns in, and cramped in down at the bottom-like wuz about the biggest one of these here bull-fiddle cases ever I seen in my life."

"You didn't handle this bass-fiddle case—shiftin' the load, say?"

"No, suh. Why, all lamed up like she wuz and all bloody, and her havin' jest lost a husband, she even stopped long enough to lock up that there car before we went into Doc Townsend's."

"It's been long years since I wuz down at that Big Hole of yours," Judge Priest said, making his tone casual. "But, ez I recall, the ridge makes out to a kind of edge and then drops off steep and there's heavy undergrowth except just below the bluff? I don't suppose anybody studied the tracks at the spot where it happened—tire marks and footprints and sich?"

"Why would they? The whole place wuz all trompled down by the time I got there next mornin'."

Dr. Townsend wore on his vest lapel the little button of the United Confederate Veterans. Judge Priest owned such a button, too, and took occasion so to state, introducing

himself. Yes, Dr. Townsend had dressed the widow's wound. The bone was not seriously injured; some flesh and a lot of skin missing. "It ought to be healed up by now," he went on, "unless there was infection or the patient's blood was in poor shape."

"Well, much obliged and I reckon I'd better be on my way," said Judge Priest.

Back again late that night at the railroad, Judge Priest did some telephoning to Major Pitman, en route, and to Dr. Lake at the latter's residence. Here he parted from Jeff. He caught one train and was on his way farther south, and Jeff caught another going in the opposite direction. Next morning the home town was excited to hear that after years of intimate association as master and man, Judge Priest and Jeff had severed relationship.

"Naw, suhs, they wuzn't to say no hard feelin's," Jeff explained. "In fact, jest before we severed ourselves frum one 'nuther, the old Boss Man gimme a note of utmost recommendation to Mister Attorney Floyd Fairleigh, an' I'm done already gone to work fur him at his country residence out here on the Lone Oak road. . . . Naw, suhs, no complaint on neither side. I reckins you mout say both of us at once't jest seemed to lose our taste fur one nurr."

At Vicksburg on the following forenoon Judge Priest called upon that Dr. Hooks who once upon a

time had made a removable bridge for the lower right jaw of one Caleb Carmichael. He had a drawing in his files of the bridgework.

The Judge's next stop was across the big river over at the thriving Louisiana city of Monroe. Here he visited the establishment of a photographer named Newton who, it seemed, had succeeded another photographer named Hunt, now deceased. It was the facsimile signature of this defunct Mr. Hunt that was printed on these two photographs which Judge Priest had pilfered from the budget of exhibits tendered in evidence.

"Naturally I wouldn't recall this female," said Mr. Newton. "I didn't take over the shop until after Hunt died. But this is his work: I'd recognize it anywhere. Let me look through Hunt's old accounts.

"Here you are," he said at length. "The books show sittings on June 11th, eleven years back, and delivery of three dozen printed pictures four days later, billed at theatrical rates. They were billed to Carey Carr, care of the Lily DeWitt Carnival Company. Oh, yes, and here's records of two re-orders mailed to other points —one to Spokane, Washington, and the other to Gallipolis, Ohio. Who was this Carey Carr?"

"His stage name wuz Carr. His right name wuz Caleb Carmichael," explained Judge Priest.

He reclaimed the photographs and went away. Still mulling things over, Judge Priest strolled aimlessly,

and presently he came to, standing on the shore of the Ouachita River, which runs through Monroe, and he looked down and saw a large craft, part barge and part steamer, which, with floating flags and brilliant lettering on its flanks, proclaimed itself as the Rice & Pease Aquatic Palace.

"Now, by gum, why didn't I think of that before!" exclaimed Judge Priest.

With a sort of ponderous alacrity he labored down the bank and entered the gay marquee which arched a hospitable gangplank. Judge Priest picked out a tall, spry person who unmistakably had about him the executive manner, and who proved to be cordial.

"The name is Rice," he stated, speaking past the slant of a tremendous cigar. "Better known amongst friends and well-wishers as Lengthy Bill Rice. How can I serve you?"

"I'm not absolutely sure you can," said Judge Priest, who had thought it expedient to drop the vernacular which ordinarily he employed. "I just wanted to ask you a few leading questions. I take it, then, that you are widely acquainted in this field—that is, with individuals?"

"Listen, oldtimer, there are more guys in this racket owing me borrowed money than the census enumerator ever meets. Come on in inside and set down."

The pair of them spent half an hour together, very pleasantly, and, on the older man's side, not entirely

without profit. At any rate, he decided progress had been made along a previously undeveloped ore-streak. That night he wired an advertisement to a weekly magazine published in Cincinnati and devoted to amusement in all its branches, for insertion in its next issue. Then, feeling better content with prospects than he had since arriving in Monroe, he overflowed a berth on a railroad train bound for New Orleans.

In his new job, and right from the outset, Jeff Poindexter appeared to have an abundance of leisure. His very first afternoon of service under Mr. Floyd Fairleigh he went rabbit hunting. His route took him across the fields stretching from the Fairleigh place towards a road half a mile or so to the southward.

Perhaps an hour later he halted at a party line of barbed wire which marked a neighboring ownership. Two dead bunnies swung by their tethered hind legs from a convenient trouser button. He had emerged from the heavy covert almost directly behind the gaunt old homestead where the late Elijah Carmichael had lived out his solitary days and where now his half-brother's widow was domiciled. Somewhat nearer to him were the dependencies—an old but stout brick smokehouse, a springhouse, obviously abandoned; a mule barn, a stable, a cowshed, now serving as a garage; and, back of the inner yard

fence, one log cabin, the lone survivor of what, once upon an ante bellum time, had been a whole row of slave quarters.

From the shelter of a clump of sassafras bushes Jeff studied what lay before him. The "big house" was tightly shuttered. Just beyond the cabin a very old, very feeble colored man was slashing at a log of firewood. A large, tawny dog was lying at the edge of the chopping place.

Quite slowly, Jeff slipped between two of the rusted strands. Instantly the dog was up and coming at him.

Jeff neither retreated nor threatened. He stood in his tracks, making small soothing, clucking sounds. Puzzled by these tactics, the dog hesitated, slowed down. Moving very deliberately, Jeff produced from a vest pocket a bit of paring from a horse's hoof. He dropped this odorous offering by his foot and the dog mouthed at it, licked the morsel enthusiastically. Next Jeff sat down on a handy stump, got out his knife, and deliberately skinned and beheaded one of his rabbits, then dismembered the cadaver and fed the gobbets of hot meat to the dog. He took his time about it. When the last delectable chunk had vanished, the dog was nuzzling Jeff's hand, making low rumblings in his chest, getting the smell of Jeff's garments in his nostrils.

The dog trailing at his heels, Jeff dawdled across the lot. When at length the ancient darky saw him, Jeff smiled and by signs made clear

his intent. He took the ax from those uncertain hands and made the chips fly, the dog looking on approvingly. Presently a Negro woman came forth from the kitchen wing. At sight of Jeff she stopped abruptly.

"Whut you doin' yere, boy?"

"Mizz Hester Morgan, ain't it?" asked Jeff, removing his cap.

"Ef'tis, den whut?"

"Wellum, I works at Mist' Fairleigh's on the next place adjoinin'. So I jest dropped by to say howdy."

"Huh! We ain't havin' no truck wid neighbors."

"Yessum, but I'm same ez home folks. Many's the time I heared my ole mammy mention you—Libby Poindexter, she wuz."

"I knowed Sist' Poindexter. Dat any reason why I got to know you?"

"No'm, not widout you'd keer to, ven'able lady. But I wuz jest thinkin' to myself 'at mebbe you-all might accept this yere molly har' w'ich I kilt it few minutes ago, ez a free-will offerin', sort of."

"Lemme look." Her practiced fingers dug into the yielding tissues. "Feel lak he all-kidney-fatted, don't he?" she said. Her tone was mollified.

"Lemme clean him fur you, Aunt Hester. Fust, tho', lemme git a few mo' sticks of stove-wood laid by."

"That ain't a bad idea, neither," she said. "Suttin'ly is a heap of logs needed 'round yere someway. . . . Well, Br'er Poindexter, when you gits th'ough, better come on in our house an' set a spell."

It was good and dark when Jeff

went home across lots. He had asked no definite questions, had been most casual, had betrayed no unseemly curiosity. Yet he knew more about the ways of that house under its present regime and about the new mistress of it than another investigator could have gleaned in a month of Sundays. He knew what went on in and about the old Carmichael place by day. He didn't know—yet—what went on in and about it by night, because it would appear that when Aunt Hester and the deaf-mute retired they retired for keeps and for sleeping purposes.

Best of all, Jeff knew that thereafter he could invade these premises at any hour and be assured of a hospitable reception by the dog.

There was a nipping edge on the October air and the young moon that rode in the pale sky looked cold and crumbly. It was getting on toward midnight, moreover—the dread hour when graveyards are, on the best authority, said to yawn.

Jeff Poindexter shivered and bit hard with his underjaw to keep his teeth from chattering. He was stretched out, face downward, on the sloped roof of a latticed side porch at one corner of the old Carmichael homestead. He was looking into the bedroom of the solitary tenant of that house, a room at the eastern end of the building on the second floor. Through the slats of a wooden blind he watched the figure within. Dressed in a house wrapper,

it sat at a dressing table not ten feet from him.

While he watched, the occupant stripped from her wounded hand the bandages which encased it, revealing to him a wound which looked very raw and angry. From a medicinal-looking tube she squeezed a little wormlike ribbon of some pasty material and anointed the injured thumb, then rewrapped it with a new strip of gauze and slipped on a rubber thumb guard.

This done, she combed out her hair, strand by strand, until it hung in a thick, dark mane upon her shoulders, and then doused it from a tall, slender bottle which to Jeff suggested barbershop tonics.

At length she was done with these purely personal services. She gathered together the articles she had been using and restored them to a leather toilet case. Then she fastened the toilet kit, using a small key.

Now she got up and passed out of Jeff's limited range of vision. Almost immediately, though, she came back into sight. Carrying an old-fashioned lantern, unlit, she passed through a door.

Instantly Jeff was back-scuffling over the eaves of that porch. His toes found purchase in the latticework and very quickly he was on the earth—so quickly, in fact, that when the woman's form emerged from a rear doorway, downstairs, Jeff was already crouched behind a jog in the kitchen wall not twenty feet distant.

She crossed the dooryard. At the wood-pile she gathered up an arm-load of fireplace lengths, and then she went directly into the squat old smokehouse. Jeff, harkening, heard a dimmed wooden clatter which he took to mean the smokehouse had been barred from within.

At once, through the customary draft vents up under the overhang of the gabled roof, there showed dimmed patches of light, to prove that the occupant had set the wick of her lantern to burning, and then wisps of smoke began oozing out of those chinks.

Stealthily, step by step, Jeff executed a flanking advance upon that smokehouse. At the back of it a second-growth oak tree almost touched it. Jeff silently hoisted himself until he was posed in the main crotch. At that elevation, a line of orifices, like so many minute portholes, were only slightly above the level of his eyes. Since he could not turn his gaze downward, there would be nothing to see except blackened rafters. But, by craning his neck and standing tiptoe, he could sniff in. This he did, drawing his head back before the escaping smoke rifts made him cough.

With watering eyes and a gasping throat he repeated the motion. Already those inquisitive nostrils of his had recorded the first smell to gush forth—the honest smell of dry hickory ablaze. But presently with it was mingled an acrid, varnishy taint which stung his nose membranes. He

softly snorted out this evil fume and, with his face turned aside, waited until the volume of it had lessened.

Well, one thing was certain. The lady must be fairly suffocated by now. Any minute now she would have to come out for breath. But before he departed Jeff took one more whiff.

He turned cold and rigid, and the flesh crawled on the nape of his neck. Was an overcharged imagination playing tricks on him or did he catch a different and an identifiable reek? . . . It wasn't imagination. The new odor grew heavier, more definite, more unmistakably what it was.

Jeff slid down to solid, friendly ground and streaked away from there.

Uncle and nephew sat over Creole coffee in a restaurant on the French side of Canal Street.

"Well, that's that, Uncle Billy. By all accounts, the pair of them kept closely under cover all the four months they were in Houston—lived behind closed doors in a rented bungalow on a back street. I couldn't find anybody in the vicinity who'd so much as seen Carmichael. A few neighbors did catch semi-occasional glimpses of the wife—vaguely described as being rather tall for a woman, not too stout, not too thin, quietly dressed, and with no particularly distinguishing marks."

"But, as I was just telling you, I think I found out why they were ly-

ing so low—or, rather, why he was. About a month after these two landed in town, the police department out at Seattle asked the police department of Houston to locate, if possible, one Caleb Carmichael, better known as Carey Carr, and sometimes known, it would seem, as Dr. Cicero Carter, which is an alias we never knew about before eh? So I had a discreet talk with the Houston chief of detectives—mighty fine, intelligent fellow. He said he notified Seattle he had the party in question spotted, and what about it? The answer back was that in case of certain contingencies Seattle might want an arrest made, but that until further notice nothing was to be done at the Texas end, except to keep a weather eye on the man. The next thing the Houston authorities knew the couple had pulled out, bag and baggage.

"And also with at least two tootin' horns and seemin'ly about the most majestic bull-fiddle case on record," supplemented Judge Priest.

"Well, anyway," went on Major Pitman, "inside of a week later, or some such matter, the local papers printed a press dispatch saying that Caleb Carmichael, while on his way to his former home in Kentucky, had been accidentally drowned. Just to be on the safe side and show they weren't overlooking any bets, the Houston force wired Seattle, and in reply promptly received word that the police out there had also read the same dispatch and, the person being

dead, that the incident was closed. I took down the name of the Seattle chief in case you'd care to communicate with him."

"I think, son, I've got a better notion than that. That time I wuz out in Denver, Colorado, attendin' the Bar Association meetin', I met up with a powerfully clever lawyer from Seattle—he stands high out there. I'll send him one of these here night lettergrams, askin' him to make a few inquiries in the proper quarter and lemme know the results ez soon ez possible."

"Well, suh, what's the next move?"

"Well, you better go ahead and light a shuck fur God's country. Ef Hod Maydew should git impatient to have that there will probated, you can't do nothin' because your absent-minded old uncle went away sick, leavin' the will locked up in his safe, and nobody except him knows the combination. That'll give us a leeway of ez many days ez we'll probably need—and mebbe we won't need many more unless I should have to take a quick trip in the general direction of the South Atlantic seaboard."

At that Major Pitman's eyebrows rose so high they almost merged with his scalp line. Judge Priest chuckled.

"Sort of jolted you, didn't I, boy? Well, detective work seems to call fur more travelin' than I figgered on. But I'll say one thing fur it: You come in contact with some mighty

prominent and influential people. F'rinstance, now, I bet you never knew anything a-tall about the career and achievements of Mr. Lengthy Bill Rice, a mighty genteel gentleman, even ef he does talk a curious kind of lingo. And I'll bet you further that ontill now the lifework of Mr. A. A. Slupsky, better known to countless thousands as Appetite Albert, has been to you like a sealed book. I wuz entertained by the first-named celebrity up at Monroe in this state, and am indebted to him fur several helpful suggestions."

"Helpful in connection with what?" asked the amazed major.

"Why, helpful in connection with findin' the present earthly whereabouts, ef any sich there be, of the venerable and almost equally distinguished Mr. Appetite Albert. Here's the way I'm fixin' to go about it."

From a capacious side pocket he extracted a folded copy of a bulky periodical.

"This," he expounded, "is called the *Three-Sheet*. They call it the trouper's Bible. Well, the grand special souvernir fall-openings edition, due to be on all newsstands everywhere tomorrow, will contain an advertisement requesting that if same comes to the attention of Mr. Appetite Albert or anybody else who might know his present earthly habitation, ef any, a great favor will be conferred by telegraphin' collect to Lemuel K. Jones, care Room 874, Hotel Beauregard, this city."

"But who in thunder is Lemuel K. Jones?"

"Oh, that'll be me. I always did think Lemuel wuz a stylish name."

"Quite so!" said the nephew with irony. "You make everything just as clear as mud. And when you find Mr. Appetite Albert, what then?"

"Why, then I'll either crave leave to call on him or, in case he's passed away, git permission to examine his amassed collection of rare printed matter. He wuz the outstandin' pitchman of his day, specializin' mainly in slum' and physic. But he wuz equally eminent in two other departments. He could swallow anything he fancied in any given quantity, and his other hold on immortal fame wuz based on these proud but truthful boasts of his: First, that durin' half a century and more he had met everybody that had ever figgered in the entertainment world; and furthermore it seemed that, havin' once met sich parties or even heard of 'em, he rarely ever forgot the facts; but, ef he did, could refresh his memory frum a monumental assortment of showbills, pictures, press notices, clippin's, obituary notices, programs, et cetera, et cetera, which he gethered up ez he went along and sorted away in a sort of filin' system of his own."

"At last I begin to get a little gleam," said Major Pitman. "Through this notable personage you hope to trace the professional life of somebody, presumably Caleb Carmichael and his wife, Martha

Swopes Carmichael—is that it?"

"Purcisely that. So you see why I've got to hang around here long enough fur Lemuel K. Jones to git some results from his advertisin' campaign. Say, Ranny, you've jest about got time to ketch the flier fur home, ef you hurry."

Those times, long-distance telephoning was more of an undertaking than afterwards it became, but, once Major Pitman was on the right trail, he very promptly succeeded in getting through to his truant kinsman. From the city of Richmond, Va., no less, there came over the wire a familiar treble saying: "Well, son, how's tricks?"

"Not so good. Hod Maydew kept pestering me about that will business. Day before yesterday, to prove how helpless I was, I took him into your chambers over at the court-house and showed him that old iron safe of yours. He gave the knobs a turn and she opened out like a split watermelon. Uncle Billy, it had been standing there unlocked all this time!"

"I had a fretful feelin' that I fur-got something," lamented the old man. "Well, that's too bad. But it mout be wuss."

"It is worse, a whole lot worse. You know what he did?"

"Whut?"

"Did just what you'd expect a resourceful chap like Maydew woud do: Put out for County Judge Dyke's house; he'd rallied a little

and was semiconscious. And the poor old dying chap signed the necessary orders, admitting that will to probate and, on top of that, named the widow as the guardian of the girl."

"Whew! When did you say all this happened?"

"I didn't say. But it was Monday afternoon."

"And this is Wednesday. Why—?"

"I've been trying to locate you, but you left a twisting trail—and no forwarding addresses to speak of. Anyhow, they're moving fast, that outfit. I understand the estate is practically divided up. And only a little while ago I heard that the homestead, which belongs to the two of them jointly, has been put on the market for a quick sale."

"Well, I hate to leave here right this minute, but I'd better finish up my recuperatin' at home. I can't hardly git there, though, before early day after tomorrow mornin'. You git aholt of Lew Lake right away and tell him to go ahead with a certain clandestine undertakin'—tonight, ef it ain't too late, or anyhow not later than tomorrow night. And say, son, has any answer come yit to that wire of mine to Seattle?"

"A fat envelope arrived this evening—special delivery and marked 'Special and urgent.' Shall I open it?"

"No, hold it till I git there."

"How have you fared with your hunt for—what's his name?—the gentleman with the appetite and the scrapbooks?"

"Jest so-so. He's gone to a better world than Virginia, even. I'm goin' through his cluttered and unindexed earthly assets at the place where he passed on frum. It's no easy task. Any private communications frum Jeff?"

"Not a breath. I'm in touch with him, but even if he had anything to tell he wouldn't tell it to anybody except you."

"I reckin that's true. Well, I better be seein' about train connections at Louieville, dadgum it!"

On the second morning thereafter Major Pitman got up before the stars blinked out to greet his errant uncle. At the station Jeff Poindexter was lurking discreetly in some dark shadows. He revealed himself, handed his former employer a smallish parcel, and in the shelter of the major's car made a whispered brief report, then expeditiously vanished across the tracks. Major Pitman had with him the letter postmarked Seattle. For the moment the old man pocketed it.

"What's the latest, tidin's?" he demanded as they headed for Clay Street.

"Well, Dr. Lake pulled off that surreptitious job of grave-robbing late last night—early this morning, rather. Sheriff Birdsong cooperated, just as you arranged for before you left here. Dr. Lake telephoned that he'd be at your house at eight o'clock to let you know the results."

"That ain't so long to wait. And gives us time to git some needed nourishment down inside ourselves."

"How about the Richmond business?"

"Havin' to pull out so sudden left things kind of snarled up. I found some scattered bits of fairly informative printed matter. But there's one break in the chain, and that's what I'm still hopin' may turn up. Ef it should come to light I'm to expect a wire right off, givin' full particulars, regardless of expense. . . ."

The pair were still at the table when Dr. Lake stumped in. "Anybody liable to hear us?" he asked.

"Excusin' us, there's nobody on the place exceptin' Aunt Dilsey, and she's out in the kitchen."

"All right, then, pour me a cup of coffee, Major. . . . Well, there was no need for anything resembling a regular autopsy. I did what there was to be done right there in the vault by flashlight, and then we resealed the box and came away."

"Well?" Judge Priest's voice was higher-pitched than usual.

"Billy Priest," went on Dr. Lake, "I don't know whose body is in that coffin, but I'll swear it's not the body of the party whose name is engraved on the coffin plate."

Major Pitman whistled.

Dr. Lake said, "The face was mauled up past recognition, and the hands are mutilated, too, and the scalp. But that wasn't due to decomposition while the body was under water. It must have been done beforehand—done deliberately, I'd say."

"How about the teeth?"

"Just coming to that. While there was a gap in the lower jaw where three teeth had been pulled out, I'm dead sure those teeth were drawn after death. In short, gentlemen, I'm ready to risk my professional reputation that this body cannot be the body of Caleb Carmichael for the simple reason that it's a substituted body which had been subjected to chemical preservatives long before it was dumped in that lake. Well, what's next?"

Judge Priest got ponderously up. "The next thing," he said, "is for you two gentlemen to give me your best opinions on a few little bits of physical evidence."

In the living-room the old judge first invited the attention of his colleagues to certain time-yellowed clippings, including in his budget a creased play-program and some rumpled lithographs.

"Kind of keep track of the dates on the margins of these," he said, passing them out, one by one. "They're s'posed to run consecutively, up to the p'int where the record breaks off."

When this had been done, he said, "Next we've got this here very illuminatin' communication frum my friend, Judge Frobisher out in Seattle. I'll read it aloud."

His reading was punctuated by appreciative grunts from Dr. Lake and once from Major Pitman an exclamation:

"And now, boys, we come to the contributions of a most competent

individual and one that I'm shorely proud of," continued Judge Priest. He removed the loosened wrappings on the parcel which Jeff Poindexter had bestowed upon him at the station. His blunt fingers plucked forth a partly unreeled length of ordinary surgical gauze. It was slightly stained with some greasy substance and by its spiraling betrayed that it had lately served as a bandage.

"Lew," he said, "look at this, please, and take a few sniffs, and then give us your expert opinion ez to its character and the uses to which it's been put?"

"One sniff is ample," stated Dr. Lake, "and one glance is sufficient. The way it's still kinked up shows it was recently snugly wrapped around some small member—a finger or possibly a big toe."

"How about a thumb?" prompted Judge Priest.

"Or a thumb!" agreed Dr. Lake, and slapped his knee understandingly.

"And the stuff that wuz smeared on it—would that be good to cure up a sore thumb?"

"I should say not! That's phenolate; it would delay the normal healing processes. But why—?"

"Never mind the whys. and wherefores. Let's pass along to Exhibit B."

Gently he fished out and passed to his crony a tiny wisp of hairs, curling a little at their lower tips and of an average length of about eighteen inches.

"That's easy," said Dr. Lake. "What we've got here is a few combings from a human scalp. The length would indicate they grew on a woman's head. They're lighter at the roots than anywhere else. That shows dye had been used to turn a naturally sandy color into a very dark brown. I can guess where they came from, too."

"And your fust guess will be the right one," assented Judge Priest. "Out of the head of the Widder Carmichael."

"Then why all this bother about a strand of topknot? It may be foolish—and vain—for a woman to dye her hair, but I never heard it was any crime."

"No crime, but mebbe it wuzn't so foolish, neither. And here's some little souvenirs fur you to scrutinize."

For their inspection he tendered three minute and irregular splinters of thin wood. In turn his companions fingered these fragments, rubbed them, bent them, smelled them; then, after conferring briefly, nodded to each other.

"We're agreed here, Uncle Billy," The major was spokesman. "It's fairly simple. These are scraps of a very light but strong wood, possibly used as a casing of some sort, possibly as a veneer that was stretched over a heavier framework. Originally they were painted black and shellacked. Recently an effort was made to destroy them by burning, or they were burned accidentally."

"Checks with my diagnosis," confirmed Dr. Lake. "There's traces of the polish still adhering to this one. And here's a crumb of glue—old glue, at that. All of which being conceded, what about it?"

"Hold your hosses! Before we git through I think that even without a chemical analysis it kin be demonstrated that these here specimens air overlooked salvage frum an article which fust wuz busted into scrap and then the wreckage burnt up piece-meal—in short, a bull-fiddle case of augmented purportions."

"But look here, Uncle Billy," protested Major Pitman, "aren't these bass-fiddle cases usually made of some light, stout composition, to save weight and all?"

"Nowadays, yes. But former years they made 'em of wood."

"Where'd these specimens come from? Or is that one of your secrets, too?"

"You'd have to know to understand some other disclosures that'll follow. They came off the earthen floor of the smokehouse out on the Carmichael place. To git 'em Jeff Poindexter had to pick a padlock. Once't he wuz inside, he gathered up a lot of fresh wood ashes and dead embers and some old dirt, and sifted it all out keerfully and got these here results."

Judge Priest lowered himself into a rustic rocker and, with maddening deliberation, relit his corncob pipe.

"Now, then," he said, between puffs, "let's go back to beginnin's:

Lew, you'll bear me out when I say that, jedgin' by whut word trickled back here frum time to time, after he'd left here ez a youngster, Caleb Carmichael must've been a bad egg all along. At Philadelphia, where he studied medicine, he got mixed up in some kind of funny business and left there without ever gittin' his degree.

"Well, after bein' kicked out of college he takes up play-actin' and music and sich. Then there comes a kind of gap in his theatrical record. Shortly after, though, ez we kin figger by that letter from our informant, Judge Frobisher, out in Seattle, he branched out to include fortune-tellin' and spiritualism: and, under the name of 'Doctor' Cicero Carter, also doin' a little malpractice on the side.

"In the course of his ramblin's he marries Martha Swopes, of Keokuk, Ioway.

"Now, we begin to git definite track of him ag'in. Four months ago, at Seattle, he branched out from his other dubious callin's fur long enough to perform an illegal operation on a young girl. She dies under his hands on the operatin' table. Because the girl's folks want to protect her good name, the thing's hushed up, someway. But he skips out and heads for Texas. I reckin he's more or less disguised, but, to be on the safe side, he goes to usin' his right name once more. Well, back in Seattle, talk starts. So the police there trace Carmichael. They locate him in his snug little

retreat at Houston and, ez a pre-caution, ask the Houston authorities to sort of keep an eye on him.

"Then all of a sudden he gits word that his half-brother, Elijah, has passed on up here in this county and left him a right sizable chunk of ready cash and some other odds and ends of property. With money in his possession, that Seattle family air liable, not only to tie up his share of the estate and sue him fur causin' their child's death, but likewise press a criminal charge and have him extradited out there fur trial.

"Well, there he is! Whut good is all that legacy goin' to do him ef he loses it in a damage suit and, on top of that, gits stuck into prison in the State of Washington fur mebbe a long term? There's one way out, though. There's that there will he wrote years and years before, leavin' everything he owned to his wife. Ef he's declared legally dead the money is still on tap, because his wife gits it.

"So he gits busy. Whilst he's pretendin' to be settlin' up his affairs in Houston, he's really stirrin' his stumps to set a clever scheme in motion. Frum somebody he buys the preserved body of some poor pauper answerin' roughly to his own gin'r'l plans and specifications. So he smuggles that body into his house. And he pries the jaws open and he pulls three teeth out of the lower jaw on the right-hand side, and he slips into the gap his own bridgework. Lackin' all else, and

with only a superficial examination of the mouth, which is what he's countin' on, he's provided about the best identification that anybody could ast fur.

"Here's where the bull-fiddle case comes into the picture. Let's say it's a memento of his old barnstormin' days that he's hung on to fur all these years. He gits rid of the fiddle that's in it, and into that case, by main strength, he jams that friendless unknown's body. And he loads it into his car, and him and his wife start out drivin' through to Kentucky.

"So they come skyhootin' acrost country with that cased-up corpse ridin' behind 'em. Just after they cross the state line from Tennessee into this state they turn off the main road, and he drops over to the most lonesome corner in that lonesome upper t.p of Reelfoot; to the Big Hole, where all them curious eddies air.

"Well, no sooner do they git there than things start happenin'. He drags the body out of the fiddle case. He messes up the face so it'll be unrecognizable. He dresses it up in the clothes he's been wearin' apurpose all durin' the trip—clothes that hotel clerks and camp-ground people and service-station people along the line have seen him wearin'. He dumps the camouflaged body into the Big Holé, where he's reasonably shore those strange under-water currents will hold it fur a few days anyhow before it comes to the

surface. He dresses himself up in clothes that, with any kind of luck, will keep him frum bein' recognized ez the individual he really is. And, right then and there, Caleb Carmichael, alis Carey Carr, alias Dr. Cicero Carter, vanishes.

"Now let's take up the widder's end of it. Him havin' faded frum mortal view, she takes the center of the stage. With her mashed thumb bleedin' all over her, she comes bustin' out of those bottums, spreadin' the alarm. She gits her wound patched up and then drives on through here alone, to take possession of the old home place. Ez a bereft woman, she stays in seclusion there till the dissectin'-room body is recovered and identified ez her late husband's remains, and then she sets out to prove up her right to inherit his sheer in the estate."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Dr. Lake fervently. "The next step's clearly enough indicated, eh?"

"I don't know about that," said Judge Priest.

"Then what are you going to do?" demanded his friend.

"Jest set a spell, and mebbe in the meantime try to gether up a few little odds and ends that seem to be flappin' loose."

"But, man alive, if your sequence of theories will stand the test—and I can't see a flaw in it anywhere—there has been deliberate collusion to bolster up a crooked conspiracy."

"Concedin' you're right, whut would you advise doing?"

"What is there to do except grab the woman forthwith? Stick her in jail. Keep her there till she's ready to confess where her husband's hidden away. Then indict 'em both. Send 'em both to the penitentiary. Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"Jest a minute, Lew. Admittin' there's been a heap of provable and self-evident skulduggery practiced in this here affair, even so, that's a perfectly good will that wuz offered fur probate—and probated—by the bereft lady's lawyer, wuzn't it? Ef he's alive he's still entitled to his fifty per cent in his half-brother's estate, ain't he? I'd trust Hod Maydew to git him and her both out of sich a mess with nothin' lost exceptin' a couple of reputations and mebbe a few tailfeathers fur attorney's fees. Ef, on the other hand, a human bein' has been deliberately made away with—"

"But you just now said—!" Dr. Lake straightened himself with a sudden jerk. "By heavens, Billy Priest, are you intimating there's been foul play?"

"Don't go jumpin' at hasty conclusions. For the moment let's all remain ca'm, cool, and collected."

"But if you think what you seem to be thinking, if you've got suspicions of a killing at the back of your mind, there certainly are steps to be taken."

"There certainly air. I kin think of three steps already. The first step is fur you to put a tight clamp on them waggin' jaws of yours and go

start your mornin' round amongst your patients, ef any such survivin' unfortunates there be. And the second step is fur you, Ranny, to pick your time fur it some time today and find little Juliet Blair and toll her here, unbeknown to anybody else, fur a little chat. And the third step is fur me to set right where I am and hope and pray I'll be hearin' frum Richmond betwixt now and dark. It'll be word frum there that ought to be the key to unlock the darkest closet yit."

It was getting on toward one thirty o'clock in the afternoon when Major Pitman, a deepening concern on his face, burst in on Judge Priest who, seeing that look, sat up abruptly. "Where's the girl?"

"She's gone, and the woman with her!"

"Where?"

"That's what I'm not dead sure of yet. But, wherever it is, they're both well on their way."

Judge Priest was on his feet now, mopping at his slick forehead. "While we sat here clackin' away like three old guinea hens!" he shrilled. "Go on, go on!" he ordered. "Tell me whutall you know."

"I should have gone to Mrs. Broderick's boarding house as soon as I left here this morning, but you said there was no rush, so I put in a few licks at my office first. About an hour ago my secretary came back from having a snack and told me that over at the soda fountain she'd

just heard a curious rumor from her sister, who works at the bank — something that had to do with Juliet Blair and Mrs. Carmichael.

"Inside of three minutes I was in the private office of the bank, giving Walter Ricketts a quick third-degree. He said that about two forty-five o'clock day before yesterday afternoon, the two of them came in there together, and the woman withdrew her share of the money on deposit to her account, and then, in her capacity as guardian, authorized the withdrawal of the girl's half of the funds—roughly, a total of \$18,200. Well, he tried to tell them how risky it was for two females to be carrying around that much money in cash, especially as they'd already told him they expected to leave almost immediately on an extensive sea voyage. He argued, but she stood firm. He had to scrape his vaults pretty scarce of big bills to make up a sum of that size. But he did it, and they left, after instructing him to say nothing outside the bank about the transaction."

"Wuz Hod Maydew in on this monkey business?"

"No. He left last Monday night for Louisville and he's not back yet. Well, the next thing I did was to try to reach you by telephone, and I couldn't get this number. Uncle Billy, did you call anybody, say, about three quarters of an hour ago?" he demanded accusingly.

"Yep; I had an exchange of words

with the sheriff's office. Got something fur the sheriff to do—mebbe!"

"And you left the receiver off the hook. Look yonder." He pointed toward his uncle's cluttered flat-topped desk.

"I git more furgitful every day I live," confessed the culprit.

"Since I couldn't raise you, I dusted right on out Franklin Street to Mrs. Broderick's. About noon the day before yesterday the girl came to her, so excited she could hardly speak, and told her she'd been up in her room packing and was going to go. At first she wouldn't say where she was going—said she'd pledged herself to tell nobody of the plan. But Mrs. Broderick managed to worm it out of her that she and her aunt-in-law had suddenly decided to start on a voyage around the world. They were slipping away now unexpectedly because there was somebody temporarily out of town who knew about the plan and might, if they delayed their departure until that somebody got back, try to put obstacles in the girl's path. Do you think that could be Hod Maydew?"

"I happen to be the party referred to," stated Judge Priest. "Go ahead."

"There's not much more. Before she pulled out, still fluttering like an egg beater, the little chucklehead told Mrs. Broderick, as a dead secret, that they were going to drive in a hired car to Wycksberg that evening and catch the Chicago-New

Orleans southbound flyer as it passed through there at 7:10 o'clock at night; and that some time yesterday, out of New Orleans, they would sail for South American ports. Well, they caught the train all right. I confirmed that at Farrell Brothers garage on my way out here, saw the fellow who drove 'em down. As they got aboard, the woman slipped him five dollars as a bribe to keep quiet.

... Oh, yes, the girl told Mrs. Broderick the name of the ship — the *Southland Star*."

"Sol!" Judge Priest's wheezy drawl was quite gone. He spoke snappily: "Ef the train wuz on time, they got to New Orleans considerably more'n twenty-four hours ago, givin' them better'n a full day's start on us, dog-gone it! Jump to that telephone, son, and make central raise New Orleans."

Already Major Pitman was joggling the black rubber horn on its hook. "Who'll I get—the police?" He flung the question over his humped shoulder.

"Yes! No—I've got it!" The judge began snatching a litter of contents out of his pockets. "Got it here somewhere — name of one of the fellers I shot snipes with last week at that there Delta Club. Collector of the port there, or somethin'. Here 'tis." Judge Priest was thrusting a rumpled calling card into his nephew's hand. "Tell him I say to locate a ship called the *Southland Star*. Ef by one chance't in a hundred she ain't sailed or ain't out of the mouth of

the river yet, ast him to detain her somehow, someway. Ef she has got away let him find out her fust port of call and how many passengers she carried—there's bound to be records—and, ef possible, the gineral descriptions of those passengers. Oh, yes—and whether the ship's got radio aboard. Tell him to report right back to us here. Tell that telephone girl to keep the line open. Wait, wait"—these next words seemed to be pumped out of him almost against his will—"Tell him —and tell her too—it mout even be a matter of life and death!"

He lumbered to and fro, rather like a caged hippo in a pen of impatience; then, with remarkable agility, he spun about as the telephone bell rang.

"If it's the man we're after, that's what I'd call service," said Major Pitman and glued his ear to the receiver.

It was the man he was after.

There passed forty of the longest minutes in the records of the present Christian era. For the major there was nothing to do except wait, and hold the wire and let the tolls mount up. When the other end of the wire came to life again he jumped as though he had been bee-stung. Next thing, Major Pitman was listening and answering back, and, in between, flinging over his shoulder to the palpitant Judge Priest condensed snatches of the news coming through—like this:

"*Southland Star*, independently owned, Captain Nicholson, master. Carries mostly cargo but has accommodations for a few passengers. . . . Cleared for Rio in Brazil at noon yesterday. . . . Reliable information is that she carried only two passengers, a woman and a girl. . . . No wireless equipment. . . . The collector says only a few minutes before casting off the skipper had his papers altered for a stop at Galveston to pick up a special freight consignment. . . . Ship ought to be there some time tomorrow, probably in the forenoon. . . . New Orleans officers glad to cooperate through the port authorities there. . . . Well, Uncle Billy, how about it?"

"Tell him I'm sending a thousand thanks and my best regards, and I'll be seein' him inside of a day or two, proba'ly. Tell him he needn't pester about Galveston, though. Tell him I aim to be there in the mornin' myself and handle the thing pussonally."

Having relayed the final message, Major Pitman turned a bewildered countenance upon his elder. "But, Uncle Billy, the trains can't possibly git anybody from here to Galveston by tomorrow morning."

"There's sich things ez aeroplanes, ain't there?"

"But who's going to fly us?"

"How about that there old army friend of yours, that Cap'n Duke Cubeman, that dropped out of the skies not three weeks ago to see you and give you a spin in that big, new

amphibian machine that he's pilotin' all over this southern country fur the oil people up in Louieville? Git back on that long-distance line."

The younger man told central who it was that he wanted to reach this time. An afterthought came to him: "Uncle Billy, Duke's got room for four in that big machine, besides him and his partner, Spence. You could take the sheriff along with us."

"Tell your friend there'll be jest the two of us. Whilst we're gone the sheriff's going to be burglarizin' an occupied house and a locked-up smokehouse, and, on top of that, doin' about the most thorough job of rummagin' and diggin' and probin' and soundin' that he ever tackled yit. . . . Lawsy! I do wisht we could hear frum Richmond before we git away."

The words trailed off as he lumbered out the hall door and made for the front porch, to peer into the afternoon sunshine that gilded the empty reaches of Clay Street. Then, on cue, as theatrically as a belated entrance in a scene in a melodrama, a messenger boy pedaled up that golden path on a bicycle and bounced off at the gate and came trotting toward him. Halfway down the walk Judge Priest met him, and fairly tore an envelope out of the lad's hand, shucked it open, glanced hurriedly at the two pages of type-written flimsy it had contained, and lunged for indoors.

Judge Priest shot into the living-room as Major Pitman straightened

up from the desk with a hand cupped across the transmitter disk and said: "Duke's on the wire. He can be here in less than two hours. But he thinks he should give those oil people some reason for taking the plane."

Judge Priest's squeaky voice clari-
oned like notes from a cracked bu-
gle: "Tell him there's been one
cold-blooded murder. Tell him we
ain't so much concerned with the
murder that's been committed ez
with the other that's bein' contem-
plated right this very minute. Then
ring off, and look at this here."

The major told his friend, and rang off, and jumped up and snatched at the typed pages and read them through.

"Gosh!" he said, almost whispering it. "Your missing clue at last — the thing that unravels everything. . . ." Major Pitman was still speaking in that stricken half-whisper. "Uncle Billy, are you sure we'll get there in time?"

"Reasonably shore—that's all. I'm bankin' that common prudence will stay those deadly hands till we kin lock a set of handcuffs on 'em."

Trim-looking and smart for a tramp steamer, the *Southland Star* came inching up toward the harbor, and a tiny tug chugged down Galveston Bay to meet her before she landed. The tug carried a government flag. At a tooted signal the steamer slowed down, until she barely held headway.

As the smaller craft drew nearer, Judge Priest, balanced on spraddling legs in the tug's bow, murmured under his breath, "Thank the Good Lawd! The girl's at the stern yonder—jest came up on the top deck."

As they edged under her flank, the ship, drifting gently now, let down a landing ladder with broad rungs. Despite age and bulk, Judge Priest was the first to go up the side, Major Pitman following him, and then the Galveston chief of detectives and one of his men.

As Judge Priest's red face showed above the guard-rail, the girl's eyes widened. Giving a little smothered cry, she ran forward, and threw herself against the old man's broad and panting breast.

"Oh, Judge, I'm so glad to see you!" she cried.

"Young woman," he wheezed sternly, "you went and broke your solemn promise to me."

"I know I did. But—but she nagged me into it. Oh, Judge Priest, there's something wrong—I can feel it. And I'm frightened."

"Jest where is this here tourin' companion of yours?" he asked.

"Downstairs—I mean, down below, in her cabin, right next to mine."

"And the money you took with you?"

"She has it—hers and mine, too. We were going to get—what do you call 'em?—letters of credit at New Orleans, but she said there wasn't time to stop—"

"You better wait right here, honey, with my nephew," he told her. "Me and these here two gentlemen have got some business with your—your travelin' mate."

The captain of the *Southland Star* had been in conference meanwhile with the officers. His face set gravely at what they told him, but he said nothing until they were done.

"This way," he said, leading the way.

The port officer stayed behind. The remaining four went down a companionway. They came to a metal door and the master of the vessel tapped on it with his knuckles.

"Who is it?" asked a voice from within.

"Captain Nicholson," he said.

"I'm not dressed for company; I'm doing my hair."

"Sorry," he called back, "but I must ask you to let me in."

"Come in, then."

The occupant of the roomy but plainly furnished cabin was sitting before a small dresser at the foot of the bunk; electric bulbs furnished illumination. The figure was black-clad; the heavy dark hair was loosened and flowing down about the shoulders. A heavy coating of white powder was upon the anxious face. At sight of strangers shouldering in behind the skipper, the form stiffened.

"What do you want?"

It was the chief of detectives who answered. "We want you," he said. "You're under arrest."

"What for?" The voice was gulping, choking, shaken, held under partial control by painful effort.

"We want you for murder, committed in Hickson County, Kentucky, on the twenty-fourth day of August."

There was a false note of incredulity, a cracked and futile effort at derision, in the words that fell slowly and forcedly from the stiffening, red-painted lips: "Are you actually accusing me of the murder of my husband?"

"No!" The retort came in a shrill piping from an unseen speaker beyond the threshold. "But we air accusin' you, Caleb Carmichael, of the murder of your wife."

In a frenzy of desperation the trapped killer leaped headlong at them, and went right between the startled captain and the chief, by a twist of the body eluded the clumsy, clutching hands of the second policeman, and would have been through the doorway except for a large bulk thrusting forward to block the flight. There was a thump of colliding bodies; a grunt from one, a hoarsely shouted oath and a blow from the other, a grappling, and the pair of them went down. Judge Priest somehow managed to be on top.

He stayed on top, indulging in curious billowing motions of his frame, until the officers could reach in beneath and pin the wrists of the one who was being crushed and lock the steel cuffs on.

One of Judge Priest's pudgy hands kept going up gently to caress a knobby bruise on his cheek where the murderer's fist had targeted its single chance blow. With Major Pittman he was speeding by motor across the coastal plains of southeastern Texas. Juliet Blair was already aboard a train bound for her home and her sweetheart. That blood kinsman of hers lay in the Galveston jail, and would continue to lie there until officers arrived with requisition papers for his return to Kentucky and a prompt trial. The old judge was doing the talking:

"When Lew Lake reads the big tidin's in tonight's *Evenin' News*, then he'll know whut it wuz kept confusin' the true path. Think of it, Ranny, 'twuz only yistiddy mornin' when us three sat there in my house speculatin' on this and that, and only yistiddy evenin' when I got that long telegram from Richmond that made the scales drop away frum my bewildered and befuddled old eyes! Considerin' whut's happened sense, it seems like about two weeks must have passed, instid of a space of twenty-odd hours. 'Boy, we been movin' fast!'"

"So fast and so furiously," said the major, "that for me there are still points needing to be amplified—clarified, rather. Do you mind?"

"Mind doin' a little recapitulatin'? I should say not. When a job's finally done up all shipshape, it's only human nature fur a feller to crave to brag.

"F'rinstance now, take that suspiciously long delay at Reelfoot Lake, and the letter to the girl that wuz confiscated and destroyed, and the mashed thumb that wouldn't heal up, and, most of all, the bullfiddle case. Those things alone should 'a' been enough to head me down the main track. But no, I kept lettin' that long hair and those false teeth and, biggest puzzle of all, those two photographs—I kept lettin' them steer me off on a blind sidin'. Yit all along I had the feelin' that when we got to the bottom of the matter of those photographs we'd see the whole thing jest unrollin' like a scroll. And the moment we got word of the finding of that obscure paragraph out of that country paper in Louisiana, it certainly did!"

"Here's how I rebuilt the sequence: Hardly has he been doin' these female impersonations any time a-tall, but long enough to have at least two poses photographed in costume, when he gits a rich idea, and he says to himself, whut's the use of his wastin' this here new gift of his fur a cheap salary in a cheap travelin' show. when he kin utilize it where it'll guarantee an easier livin' and real dividends; like at fake spiritualistic seances, when he kin go into a seemin' trance ez a man, and five minutes later come slidin' out of the cabinet ez the embodied spirit of some poor dupe's dead mother or wife or daughter. So he leaves his hair long and hides

it under a wig, and only sheds the wig when he's materializin' ez a woman.

"So, after all those intervenin' years, there he is, with that long hair fur his hole-card and a couple of copies of those old photographs ez aces up his sleeve when the word reaches him that he's come in fur a fat windfall.

"Fust, then, he decides ef he's goin' to have liberty and peace to enjoy his inheritance, he's got to disappear altogether and forever more ez Caleb Carmichael and thereafter be somebody else. And—and this is the real crux—ef his wife simultaneously disappears, he kin start bein' her and, ez his own heir, claim the estate and laugh in secret at those damages-hongry folks out in Seattle. All right, then. Let's assume that, ez a beginnin' step in his scheme, he induces his wife to write that affectionate letter to Juliet Blair. By the way, I'm pretty sure she wuz left-handed, Mrs. Martha Swopes Carmichael wuz. Suspectin' nothin', the deluded woman-writes-the-letter. She gives it to him, unsealed, to be mailed. He takes out of it the authentic pictures of herself that she included and fur them substitutes the two misleadin' photographs of himself in his female make-up. Unbeknownst to her, he's got possession, someway, of a preserved dissectin'-room subject. At the same time, he lays in, fur future reference, a supply of some standard emba'min' fluid. Durin' one of her

temporary absences he smuggles this cadaver that he's bought into the house and wedges it into his big fiddle case. And when he's packin' their car fur the trip to Kintucky, he puts the loaded case in the back of the car under a jag of stuff where neither she nor anybody else will have occasion to shift it. He hides the emba'min' fluid somewhere's else in the cargo.

"So off they start. All along he's had the Big Hole at the top of Reel-foot picked ez the spot where she's to die.

"Once't they're in that empty wilderness, he kills her. Workin' fast, he strips her body and strips down himself. He lugs the third passenger—the dead pauper—out of the overgrown fiddle case. He dresses the corpse of the stranger in the clothes he's just took off, and heaves it into the water to be drawed under. He dresses himself in the clothes he's stripped off his wife—and he does away with the wig he's been wearin'. He shakes down his long dyed hair, then puts it up on his head in coils, woman-fashion, and there, excusin' the marks left by the intervenin' years, stands the spittin' image of the original of the photographs already sent on to the Blair girl. Next thing, the doubled-up body of the dead woman has been jammed into the emptied fiddle case, and the fiddle case is back where it wuz before, underneath a couple of hundredweight of luggage. Even though he's worked so fast, he's been at this hellish busi-

ness fur considerable more than an hour. He's got to hurry. Then, possibly ez an afterthought—he sticks the tip of his right thumb in the frame of the car door and mashes it good and hard. Now, any seemin' discrepancy in any writin' that the seemin' widder does kin be explained away on the ground that with a thumb crippled and a hand swathed in bandages a signature would natchelly differ from whut it's like ordinarily. So, till everything's settled up, the hurt mustn't be let to heal. That's why, between visits to a doctor, he keeps applyin' that smelly stuff that makes the wound angry, then washin' it off and restorin' the doctor's wrapping's before the next office call—the same stuff that wuz on the gauze Jeff Poindexter pilfered and that Lew Lake identified fur us yistiddy.

"Well, let's go back to Reelfoot: The 'widder' spreads the word of the drownin' and gits that damaged thumb fixed up temporarily, and drives on through, straight fur the safest refuge in the world—the place where he was born and spent his early boyhood, and where he's familiar with every inch, indoors and out. Nobody's there but two old servants.

"On arrivin' at his birthplace, he drags the fiddle case inside, single-handed. I got it frum Jeff, who got it frum the two servants, that he wouldn't let 'em help with the unloadin'. Let somebody try to lift that varnished box and find how

heavy 'twuz and 'twould be enough to set even a couple of old servants to thinkin'. So, bein' accepted by the pair of 'em fur whut seemin'ly he is, he gits busy in that empty house.

"Down in the cellar he dissects the cadaver of his victim and, under cover of night, packs the dismembered fragments outdoors and, piece by piece, burns 'em to ashes. He may 'a' used acids, too—he'd know about acids. Gittin' shet of the bullfiddle case is a triflin' task in comparison with the main job. It's powerful hard fur a feller to utterly destroy every recognizable trace of an adult human body. Ef our sheriff's bunch find in that cellar or that smokehouse whut they're probably lookin' fur right this minute, it'll jest about purvide the last piece of evidence that's needed to speed our man to the scaffold.

"Here's the completed edifice: Ez soon ez the will's probated and the estate's divided and conditions air auspicious, he'll take the girl off on that sea voyage. Some dark night the girl falls overboard—that'll be history. And who's to doubt it? Landin' in foreign parts, he tells a plausible enough tale to the authorities and the American consul. Ef there's no fuss back home, he waits around for long enough to collect at long distance the proceeds frum the sale of whutever odds and ends may be left out of the estate of old Elijah. Ef a fuss is raised he charges it to profit and loss. Down there in some remote

Latin-American country the Widder Carmichael vanishes and, instead, a strange gent with a new name goes on his way rejoicin' and packin' a gratifyin' small fortune in his jeans."

"I judge you're pretty tired, suh," said his junior. "But, Uncle Billy, there's one thing I've absolutely got to know: What was it that day in the courthouse that set you on the scent in the first place?"

"Oh, that? That's simple enough now that we've got all the rest added up fur the Doomsday book. Ef you want to know whut fust ketched my eye and started my imagination workin', it wuz the way he handled his hands a couple of times whilst Hod Mayhew wuz elocutin'. You see, son, he wuz wearin' a woman's mournin' regalia. And whilst he'd doubtless worn sich riggin's plenty of times before in pursuance of his crooked doin's, nevertheless, he'd gone dressed ez a man a thousand hours, say, fur every hour that he'd gone dressed ez a woman. So he'd taken to fumblin' with the woman's jacket he wuz wearin', and that wuz when I dimly sensed somethin' wuz radically wrong."

"Just what do you mean, suh?"

"Well, a woman's clothes button frum right to left. So, when he got nervous and started buttonin' and then unbuttonin' his coat, me standin' there idly watchin' him, he went through the mechanism of tryin' to

accomplish these two processes, not by the use of his left hand, which is a woman's way, but with his right hand—the hand a man natchelly would use—even though in this case 'twuz made clumsy and awkward frum bein' all done up in bandages."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Major Pitman exploded.

"I'm plenty ashamed, myself, fur bein' so stupid," said his uncle.

"My guess is the people back in our bailiwick don't share that opinion," declared Major Pitman. "By now they're singing your praises all over town."

"Ef credit is to go where credit is properly due, they'd better save out quite a jag fur Jeff Poindexter," stated the judge. "There's no tellin' how many years it took off of Jeff's life, him prowling about, and finally into a house where, frum whut I'd told him, he could figger that, by a remote possibility, a murdered dead body had been carved up. . . ."

"I've got a twenty-dollar bill in my pocket that I'm going to slip him," said the major. "I've got a good suit of clothes I'd like to give him, too—that is, if I weren't twice his size."

"Son, don't you worry none on that score. You'll be surprised to note how much better that there suit'll look on Jeff than it ever did on you. The clothes don't have to fit Jeff. Jeff jest natchelly fits the clothes."

Donn Byrne

A Quatrain of Ling Tai Fu's

You would not have expected Donn Byrne (who wrote MESSER MARCO POLO—remember?) to be the author of mystery stories, although he had a poet's sensitivity to the smell of evil and the sound of violence; yet here is a crime story whose mood will remind you of the curious exoticism that Thomas Burke discovered in London's Limehouse . . . which your Editors could not even find the last time we were in London!

BECAUSE OF HIS PERFECT, OR nearly perfect, English there were many who believed that Li Sin was only masquerading as a Chinese. Because of the slightly slit Mongol eyes, and the swarthy color of his skin, there were others who explained his enigma by guessing he was a half-breed. It never occurred to either party that Li Sin had been sent to Eton in England, at the age of thirteen, and that from Eton he had gone to Oxford. They would not have believed it if you told them.

It never occurred to them, either, that Li Sin was a Manchu duke, with a genealogy that extended back to the days of Tang. It never occurred to them that the slant-eyed Manchu was as big a physician as any of the high-priced practitioners on Park Avenue. To the descendants of fur-peddlers, the deck-scrubbers who graced the Social Register, or to the millionaires of Long-Island who had soared into the financial heavens on an accidental oil-spout or who had amassed their fortunes

by the less reputable forms of mine-grabbing—to these, and to their wives and daughters, Li Sin was merely a tradesman or shopkeeper. It did not particularly matter to them that his shop on Fifth Avenue was filled with little gold Buddhas whose eyes were fine emeralds, with pieces of lacquer which it had taken an artist his lifetime to do, with peachblow vases transparent as a hand against the sun, with porcelains sheer as fine silks. But the structures of the ignorant did not worry Li Sin in the least. He would only raise his eyebrows and smile his bland, inscrutable smile.

Li Sin has left Fifth Avenue now, left his store which was in those days a temple of truth as well as a temple of beauty. In his own city of Tientsin the Manchu lives in stately leisure. He has reverted to his own name, Hsien Po, which is great in Manchu annals. He has reverted to his Manchu dress of brocaded blouse and silken trousers, to his mandarin's cap with its mandarin's button.

He is gone now, is Li Sin, but I can see him as plainly as though he were standing beside me. A rather squat sort of man, with a squarish face and high cheekbones. His shining black hair was parted smoothly at the side, and there was a look of health in the transparent quality of his brown skin and in the whites of his slanting eyes. There was always a quiet smile on his lips, and he wore the tweed and broadcloth of America with as much ease as the blouse and silken trousers of his own and. The only Oriental hint in his clothes was the suppressed gorgeousness of his neckties. He roamed about his great store, passing an occasional word with the attendants or stopping to greet a favorite customer, which was an honor. The customers were much in awe of Li Sin. There were incidents that had taught them to respect him.

There was the incident of the amateur pottery expert who happened to be also a millionaire. He noticed a vase of delicate blue jade.

"Oh, Li Sin," he said, "I want that. That's a wonderful piece of Ming."

"It's not Ming," the Manchu told him.

"I tell you it is Ming!" the millionaire insisted. "I'll buy it."

"I'm afraid you won't, Mr. Rensselaer," the Manchu answered blandly. "I won't sell it to you."

"Then you'll sell me nothing, ever again," Rensselaer decreed angrily.

"Oh, very well," Li Sin smiled.

To Wernerhelm, the munitions magnate, he was much shorter. The bulky financier rushed into the store rolling a cigar between his fat lips. He wanted a rug, he said, an expensive one, the best in the store. Li Sin smiled a trifle cynically and pointed out something on the wall.

"A Persian thirteenth-century," he explained curtly. "Used to belong to a shah of Persia. It costs seventeen thousand dollars."

"I'll take it," Wernerhelm nodded. "I want something for the bedroom floor."

"But, dear sir," Li Sin expostulated, "one doesn't put that on the floor. One hangs it on a wall."

"I don't care a damn." The munitions man drew out his check book. "Anything good enough for the shah of Persia's wall is good enough for my feet."

"My good sir—" Li Sin's voice was as bland as ever—"you are making a mistake. There are several grass-rug emporiums on Second Avenue. Go into the next drugstore and look one up in a telephone book. Take a trolley across Fifty-ninth Street. They'll sell you one, and you can carry it home beneath your arm."

These things created a legend about Li Sin that will never die on the Avenue. Cynics say that it was good advertising, and brought people who liked to be insulted. But we, who knew the Manchu, were certain that was the last thing he had in mind.

Peculiar as Li Sin's business habits were, more peculiar still were his friends. Among them might be counted a European ambassador in Washington, a great heavyweight wrestler, a little Roman Catholic priest, a headwaiter in a restaurant. All of these people he liked for some quality that his shrewd eyes had discovered. And last but not least was Irene Johns.

She had come into the store one soft spring morning, looking for a birthday present for her mother, something inexpensive, she said, about two dollars, all—she laughed merrily—she could afford. Perhaps it was that gurgling laugh of hers, that limpid, hurried, harmonious scale, that drew Li Sin's attention. He came forward with a suggestion when she and the salesman became nonplussed at the problem of finding something pretty, good, and worth two dollars.

"Perhaps I can help," he smiled.

She impressed him with her appearance as much as with her laugh. There was something so ethereal about her that she seemed less a being of flesh and blood than the disembodied spirit of spring. Her fair hair, her starlit purple eyes, her eager, half-closed small mouth with its glint of little teeth, her slim neck stood out against her heather costume and black, sweeping hat like a softly modulated light. She was so little, so slender, that she seemed as delicate as a snowflake. She moved with the lightness of a feather stir-

ring along the ground. And yet, Li Sin saw with his physician's eye, she was not fragile. She was as healthy as an athlete.

"I think I can find you something," he said.

He did. In the rear of the store he discovered a roughly hammered silver brooch from Bokhara, a marvel of intricacy and sweeping lines; he had bought it in Bokhara himself for two rubles. The thing had interested him.

"But this must be more than two dollars!" She spoke in wonder.

"I paid one dollar for it in Bokhara, and I am exacting a dollar profit for it, which is not too little," the Manchu answered gravely.

By what peculiar, invisible steps their friendship ripened it would be impossible to detail; but ripen it did. The fresh, fair American beauty, slim and beautiful as a Tanagra figurine, and the squat, middle-aged Mongol liked each other, came to appreciate each other. She had an inborn love for beautiful things, and he was never weary of showing her the treasures of his store. He showed her strange, exotic jewels, collected by dead kings and queens—chrysoberyls that were at times the strange green of olives and at other times red like a setting sun, topazes with the yellow of aged wine, sunstones that glowed with a tremulous golden red, carbuncles that flashed into explosive stars of scarlet, peridots and milky moonstones, a ruby that the King of Ceylon had owned, and an

emerald that had once belonged to the unhappy Queen of Scots. Irene Johns would gasp at the sight of these things.

"They're so beautiful!" she would say. "They make the tears come to my eyes!"

That was enough for Li Sin, that gasp of appreciation. He loved the things so much himself. He had hunted his treasures up and down the earth and to and fro in it, and he wanted them to be gazed on with the appreciative eye rather than with the cold look of barter and exchange. He liked this little twenty-year-old woman, because she had the spirit of beauty within her, and because she seemed so fair and fresh and unprotected. And she liked the swarthy Mongol, not for his strange, exotic setting, but for the sheer kindness of him, the great, expansive benevolence and his consummate courtesy, which after all was nothing but the birthright of a Manchu prince.

There could be no question of love between them, for many reasons,—and—never—a—thought—of—it passed their minds. She might have been something like a niece to him, and he her benevolent uncle. They never met outside his store—except once.

He drew from her the story of what of life she had known, carefully, gently, like the skilled surgeon extracting a splinter from flesh. The daughter of a naval surgeon who had died while she was still young—and

who, Li Sin shrewdly guessed, had been somewhat of a blackguard—she lived poorly with her mother, on a meager pension. She had been brought up decently, educated well, at what must have been a terrible expense to her mother. She had not been married, beautiful as she was, because she had not mixed with people of high rank. The people of her own station were too poor to marry offhand—but there was a young ensign she mentioned as having met once or twice, and there was a faint blush on her cheeks as she spoke of it. For the illustrious and the moneyed she had either too little fortune or too little lineage.

"Too bad!" Li Sin murmured to himself, and his thoughts would have done credit to the most adroit of *schatchen*. "Too bad!"

She would breeze in, if such a word may be used of her who was as gentle as a zephyr, bringing always with her the sweetness of spring.

"Good morning!" she would greet him eagerly. "I wonder if we could find something—I want a clasp for my hair, for evening-wear—something frightfully inexpensive."

"I think we might find it." Li Sin would smile, and he would find it. He took her money, and gave her the article at a just profit on what he had paid for it. The only thing gratuitous he gave her was the travel and the adventure necessary to pick up his wonderful trifles. Of this he said nothing, and she was none the wiser.

There came the day when she entered a little excited, a little afraid, a little nervous. She wanted something more expensive than usual. She was going out that night, she explained, with somebody.

"I am going to be married soon," she blurted out. "I am engaged."

"To whom?" Li Sin asked quietly.

"A friend of my father's," she answered blushingly. "Roderick Dreg-horn, the ivory-hunter."

"I wonder if I might ask you to do something," Li Sin said slowly, "and that is: will you bring your fiancé here some day so I may congratulate him?"

"I should love to," she said; and she left him, excitedly happy, Li Sin saw; but he also noticed that she seemed a little terrified, a little aghast.

I have told the story of Li Sin to many people, now that he is gone to his home and is happy there with his poor and his pear-trees, and some of them have believed me because they know China and the manner of man Li Sin is, and some of them have believed me because they know I abhor lies as I abhor the devil. But many cannot understand it. They cannot see why a Manchu duke should become a merchant on Fifth Avenue.

"And if he is as great a doctor as you say—" they object.

There is a passage in Isaiah, I believe, which speaks of Tyre, "whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honorable of the earth." Marco Polo, that ancient

Venetian, says of Cathay that there, of all professions, the most esteemed is that of merchant. It is above arms, he says, above learning. And what obtained in the Yellow Empire when Hoang-ti led his people across the desert in the misty dawn of time obtains today, from the outer sea to the confines of Mongolia. An ancient and honorable thing it is, a fit profession for princes, a thing pregnant with ideals of honesty and fair dealing, a clean thing. There is nothing anomalous to the eye in Li Sin, a Manchu duke, unearthing the treasures of forgotten days for the New World, and exacting a just profit for the work.

As for the medicine, that was another matter. I could no more imagine Li Sin accepting money for his healing art than I can imagine him stealing alms from a blind beggar. The thing was far too holy for him. There in that glass-topped studio in his house on Fifth Avenue, above the great treasure-store, he studied his science with the enthusiasm of an amateur pursuing a hobby. A queer place it was, with its retorts and vials, its glinting instruments, its X-ray apparatus, its tubes of deadly serum and of healing drugs. And besides these were the quaint adjuncts of Oriental healing: the twisted tubes of herbs, instruments that seemed like an alchemist's dream, medicines of black, occult art as well as of benevolence, secret, untraceable poisons, liquids which, it is whispered, would bring the

dead to life for minutes, which would drive men mad.

Ask the taciturn Lee Fong, on Mott Street, that slant-eyed millionaire. Ask the leaders of the Hip Sing. At the Five Companies of San Francisco, inquire. They will speak of Li Sin as a demigod of medicine.

One hasn't to go as far as that to find out. There is a tenement-house on Hudson Street, where the Bracallos live. There is a romping child there called Beata. For years she was an object of research to physicians in hospitals, because of her twisted spine. Nothing could be done, they decided. They were wrong. Li Sin saw the white-cheeked child carried in the subway on a horrible metal stretcher, strapped to it. It hurt him—the illnesses of children always hurt him. He took charge of her. She romps about now as other children do. There are many cases of that kind.

But above all in my mind there is the tragic case of Mrs. Madge Eaton, who is now happy as a woman-farmer-on-Long-Island. Li Sin discovered her creeping up an alley-way to die from hunger, shame, and heartbreak. Against all protestation he took her home. Her story was tragic and very sordid. She had married John Eaton, a man who had come up to Maine for a holiday. He had brought her to New York. In a month he had sent her out to work. She fell ill. Eaton deserted her, taking with him all

her jewelry, all her money, all her clothes. When she was discovered, she was sent to a hospital, and when she emerged from there, she found herself without courage to kill herself and without the wherewithal to live. The police sent her to jail two weeks later. When she came out, Li Sin found her, broken, hungry, terrified, wanting to die and yet without courage to face the river.

He cured her. He brought her back to life and hope and strength. By some means he instilled into that frail and timid heart courage. But he did one thing, unknown to her, of which she might not have approved.

There was a tripartite function of Li Sin's: Firstly, there was that of the merchant, whose duty it was to discover and barter rare and costly things. Secondly came the physician's, to heal body and mind. Thirdly came that of the Manchu prince, to dispense justice.

He called Hong Kop, his body-servant, to him—that subtle and inscrutable Cantonese. He looked at the card on which he had scribbled an address, an address he had extracted from Mrs. Eaton.

"Hong Kop, you will go at once to Colon, in Panama," he announced. "You will go to this address—a gambling-house—and there you will pick up the trail of John Eaton. You will pick up the trail and follow it until you find him. And when you do find him—"

He paused for an instant. The Cantonese bowed.

"You will kill him, Hong Kop."

Six feet tall, spare as a lance, tanned to a deep brown, hatchet-faced and yet handsome in some daredevil, hypnotic way, with eyes that glinted with the vindictive sheen of a rifle-barrel, mouth twisted slightly—enough to show the cruelty hidden within—Rod-erick Dreghorn lounged into the store with Irene Johns. There was an amused smile on his powerful face, as though it pleased him whimsically to accompany his fiancée on a shopping expedition, to meet her queer friends.

"Li Sin," she said, "this is the man I am going to marry."

The Manchu smiled gravely. Dreghorn watched him with an amused, contemptuous glance.

"There is no need to wish felicity," said Li Sin, courteously, "to the future husband of Miss Johns." And Dreghorn nodded in an offhand way. The hunter turned to the girl.

"Didn't you want to get something here?" he asked, "some silk or something?" Li Sin noted beneath the man's soft tones the concealed edge that could cut on occasion like a rawhide whip. Rapidly Li Sin was summing the man up in his mind: forty-five, he decided, a man of the world, a gentleman born, an utter blackguard, a man who had done and seen evil things. He had money, too—witness the plain but

expensive cut of his brown tweeds. Li Sin noted quickly a faint scar on the temple that he knew to be an old bullet-wound, and a weal across the fingers of the right hand that only a long knife could have made.

"Would you care to come and help Miss Johns select the silk?" Li Sin asked. Dreghorn smiled, and there was a lift to the left corner of his mouth that showed the teeth. It was like a dog's threatening snarl.

"I don't think so," he drawled. "I am not interested in any products of the yellow or black countries."

"Indeed!" Li Sin murmured.

Excitedly, at the end of the store, Irene Johns told her story. Dreghorn—in a moment of boredom, Li Sin judged—had dropped in to see the family of a man he had known fifteen years before in Hongkong. He had heard of Mrs. Johns and her daughter from some casual acquaintance. Li Sin smiled; the casual acquaintance had spoken of the daughter's beauty, most probably. Mr. Dreghorn had been so kind to all of them! He had taken them out, had showered presents on them, had in the end asked her to marry him.

"Indeed!" Li Sin thought, and he encouraged her to go on.

He was so big, so powerful, she hinted. He had done big things, had had great adventures. She seemed a little aghast as she mentioned that. He was so compelling, she said.

"She is not in love," thought Li Sin. "She is hypnotized."

He was going on one more expedition, she told the Manchu. After that, he was coming home to settle down.

"Agh!" Li Sin exclaimed to himself. So that was it. The old, old story, as old as Cain: the rake, the scoundrel, after sucking the world dry of wickedness, wanted a wife, home, and children. Li Sin could understand how the girl's purity, her lightness, her youth, had appealed to the world-worn rascal. He could understand the visions the man had—the sweet, hawthorn-scented dreams. It was like a murderer seeking to wash the blood from his hands with God's pure water.

They left. Li Sin escorted them courteously to the door.

"Goodbye!" he wished them.

"Goodbye, my yellow friend," Drehorn answered contemptuously. Irene Johns did not hear it.

Li Sin went above to his apartment. He clapped his hands for Hong Kop.

"You will go down, Hong Kop, to the house of Ling Wah Lee—"

The Cantonese made his eternal bow.

"And you will have him find out for me, Hong Kop, all there is to be known about Roderick Drehorn, hunter of ivory, with a bullet-mark on the forehead and the weal of a Burmese knife on the right hand."

There is a doctrine in one of the faiths that man is born in original sin, and that unless he is cleansed by

sacrament he is until the end of time the property of the evil one. There is an article of dogma in the same faith that one may become possessed of demons. If this is true, then never a sacrament was said over Drehorn, nor ever was he confronted with the exorcist's mystic and terrible formula. Hell seemed to have employed him all his life and to have made him its brain and hand. The first of the story was bad enough, with its record of treachery, of gainful crimes in the dark lands, of murders concealed and never explained. Even Li Sin's worldly-wise mind was shocked by Hong Kop's report. There was the incident in the Belgian Congo when Drehorn, allied with a corrupt Belgian official, burned a village with all the inhabitants, shooting down those who tried to escape from the flames. They had not produced enough ivory.

"Even madness will not explain that!" Li Sin shook his head.

There was the incident during the period of the Boxer chaos in Yuen-Lau, when Drehorn and an associate had tortured an old mandarin, hoping to make him unearth treasure. They had given him the torture of the bowstring, and the water torture, and the torture of red metal at his feet.

"And he an old man," Li Sin thought, "four-score and five!"

There was the incident in Mombasaland when the fiendish natives had captured a lone hunter of ivory,

had crucified him on the ground, smeared with honey for the ants, delirious under the smashing sun. Drehorn could have rescued him, for he was well-armed and had a large party of natives. But he contented himself with stealing the man's ivory and leaving him there to die.

"That is one thing for which there is no punishment," Li Sin thought. "No punishment is equal in horror."

Li Sin read another incident, and he read no farther. It was the story of Marie Tirlemont, called *Flanc-de-neige*, whom Drehorn had brought with him from Maxim's in Paris, down to the Congo. She had ceased to amuse Drehorn a hundred miles south of Léopoldville, and he had abandoned her alone, in a village of black beasts.

And now Drehorn, Li Sin mused, wanted to marry. He wanted to marry this fair little American girl, pure and delicate as the petal of a primrose, light and shimmering and gay as iridescence on water—to make a home with her, to have her bear children.

He called for Hong Kop.

"What is the profit of crime, Hong Kop?" he asked.

"The profit of crime is death," he answered.

"Death is a sweet and gentle thing, Hong Kop," his master mused. "It comes to the old like a gentle and sweet-scented sleep. It comes to the suffering like a greatful anodyne. It is not the profit of

crime, Hong Kop, except for those who wish much to live."

He mused again, joining his finger-tips together and knitting his brows.

"Unless, instead of being a sweet sleep, it is a nightmare, Hong Kop! Unless, instead of being an anodyne, it is a horror! Unless it comes accompanied by a huge and monstrous fear, a terror that clutches the heart-strings, a fear that kills!"

He was going away on the morrow, Drehorn said. He would be away for six months, and then he would return, and they would be married. He wanted to buy her something before he left, a ring or a bracelet.

"But she wanted to buy it here," he sneered at Li Sin.

"I wanted to buy it here," she replied, "because here I can get the most beautiful things in the world."

"If you care for that yellow junk," Drehorn laughed shortly.

"Roderick!" she protested quickly. She was pained through and through. Li Sin smiled reassuringly at her. But Drehorn wandered on.

"She spoke of getting the house at Huntingdon decorated in some Oriental style," Drehorn laughed. "She can have it if she wants it. But I don't see why she couldn't have it done in honest white style."

Li Sin smiled blandly as ever.

"You don't seem to have a high opinion of Asia or Africa," he remarked casually.

"I have no use for any color except white," Dreghorn answered brutally.

"It is a harsh thing," Li Sin reproved him. Irene Johns stood by, pale, nervous, and hurt. "It is a grievous thing to wound the body, but it is a more grievous thing to wound the soul. And to wound it unjustly is more grievous still."

"I deal in facts," Dreghorn laughed.

"May I show you a fact?" Li Sin went on. "You have been in China, and if I mistake not, you read Chinese."

"Among my many accomplishments," Dreghorn sneered, "is the reading of Chinese."

Irene looked at him with a sort of fearful agony in her eyes. She had never seen his brutality creep out before, and she was shocked at the sight of him lolling across the counter and striving his utmost to hurt the smiling Manchu. Li Sin took up a book from behind him, a broad, thin book, the stiff parchment pages of which were edged with gold. He opened it carefully. The leaves had the stiffness of steel.

"These are the verses of Ling Tai Fu, of Tientsin," the Manchu said, "a poet of the last century who had traveled into Russia. He complains bitterly of the same prejudice, and he deals with facts, which you deal with. Here is his poem 'The Return.' Perhaps you will translate it."

Dreghorn looked down the page smilingly.

"They have laughed at me, they of the North—me, of the race of Chang! Because of my skin like an autumn leaf, because of my slitted eyes, Because they were white as the sun, they said, white as light! And yet—whiter than white is the leper.

White is the hibiscus tree with fluttering blossoms, white as they! But whiter than it is the snow which numbs its roots in the ground! White are the men of the North as the sun, white as light! And yet—whiter than white is the leper."

Dreghorn laughed easily. Irene shivered with horror.

Li Sin smiled.

"Those are facts," the Manchu said.

"Is there any more of this?" the hunter asked, turning over the steel-stiff leaf.

"No more," Li Sin answered. "I should have warned you about these old parchment leaves. You have cut your hand."

Dreghorn looked at his left thumb. The edge of the book-leaf had sheared into it as sharp and as painlessly as the edge of a razor. A few minute drops of blood showed on the skin.

"You had better have a little peroxide," Li Sin suggested.

"I'm not a child," Dreghorn laughed. "It isn't anything. Come on, Irene."

They left the store together, and as was his wont with favored customers, Li Sin saw them to the door. The girl was flushed with

mortification, and she shot the Manchu a mute appeal of apology. Dreghorn smiled again.

"*Au revoir*, my poetical friend," he laughed.

"Goodbye!" answered Li Sin, gravely.

Li Sin saw little of Irene Johns for the next six weeks. Once she came into the store, but she was nervous and flushed, as though she thought the Manchu would hold against her the insults Dreghorn had offered him. But he took pains to show her that he and she were as close friends as ever.

"Mr. Dreghorn will be back in six months?" the Manchu asked gravely:

"In six months," she answered listlessly. "He has gone to Abyssinia."

"And you will be married soon after?"

"Immediately he comes back, he insists," she said.

The glamor and hypnotism and force of the man's presence no longer enthralled her, Li Sin could see. She was fearful of the step she was taking. But she was certain it was going to take place. Once Dreghorn returned, the quality of his masterfulness would grind down all opposition, even were she to show any.

"I want you to come in soon," Li Sin told her. "I have some things coming from Peking I wish you to see."

But she did not come in. In place of her there entered the store, six weeks after Dreghorn had sailed, a tall, heavily built young man with a tanned face. He asked for Mr. Li Sin.

"I am Li Sin," the Manchu told him.

"My name is Gray, surgeon on the Cunarder *Hibernia*, between New York and Algiers. Miss Johns asked me to tell you something, and she would like to see you, if it is not asking too much. She is prostrated at home. Her fiancé is dead."

"Mr. Dreghorn is dead!" Li Sin commented simply. "How?"

"He came out of the smoking-room one night, after talking to me about his intended," the surgeon went on glibly. He seemed to be repeating something he had rehearsed. "We were off Algiers, and though the night was fine, a cross-sea was running. He said he would not turn in for a half-hour yet, and the last I saw of him he was leaning against the starboard rail of the boat-deck. We never saw anything more of him. There can be no doubt that he fell overboard."

Li Sin studied him for a few minutes silently.

"Dr. Gray," he said simply, "you will pardon a man who is twenty years older than you, and who has seen much of the world and much of life, but—that is not what happened. Dr. Gray, how did Dreghorn die?"

"I know Miss Johns," Li Sin

went on, "and I knew Drehorn."

"If you know Miss Johns," the young surgeon blurted out suddenly, "you know the best and most beautiful woman I have ever seen; and if you knew Drehorn, you knew the damnedest scoundrel unhang'd."

"That, too, I know," said Li Sin.

He waited an instant. The surgeon was uncomfortably silent.

"Dr. Gray," the Manchu insisted, "of what did Drehorn die?"

"If you want to know, and have the right to know," Gray burst out savagely, "the man died because he had contracted the most virulent case of leprosy I have ever seen in the tropics. How he did it, God only knows. He was quite well when he left New York except for a rash on his left hand. He must have been impregnated with some horrible virus. In a few days I had to manacle him in his cabin. For a week the man was a shrieking maniac. I thought something might be done when we got to port. There was no chance. In Algiers they would have put him in the leper colony. So one night I took him up to the boat-deck and let him go overboard."

There was an instant's silence.

"I knew of the man," the doctor said bitterly, "and I can't even pray to God for his soul!"

"But I must!" said Li Sin.

"You will go up and see Miss Johns," the surgeon reminded him. "She will get over it."

"She will get over it, and be hap-

py, and marry a good man," the Manchu told him. "I will go to see her." And they parted.

He went upstairs to his apartment, very slowly. Softly he clapped his hands. The silent Cantonese came.

"Hong Kop," he asked, "tell me, Hong Kop, you who are young, how does love come?"

In fluting, sibilant Cantonese the servant answered:

"There is beauty," he said, "and it calls to manliness with the call of cymbals. They meet and wing upward, as Chung Tzu wrote, 'like a hymn recited softly at the death of day.'"

"There is beauty, and there is manliness!" the Manchu mused. "There is Irene Johns, and there is —" He smiled an instant, and then became as grave as ever. "You will go to Brooklyn, to the Navy Yard, Hong Kop, and you will find for me an ensign called Nelson. You will find where he is, Hong Kop. . . .

"I am getting old, Hong Kop, I am getting old. The pear gardens of Tientsin are bursting into silver and mauve. Again with the spring the musicians tune their lutes of jade. The throbbing chords do not awaken me. Hong Kop, I am old."

He rose wearily.

"Call the gray limousine, Hong Kop," he directed, "and then go on your errand."

He stretched his arms out for his fur coat, but suddenly he remembered something. He went upstairs to the glass-roofed laboratory; tak-

ing a parcel from a bronze chest, and unwrapping the antiseptic-soaked coverings, he brought out a book, a broad, thin book, the stiff parchment pages of which were edged with gold. Carefully he lighted the muffle-furnace, and carefully he placed the volume in it. And while he waited for the volume to be consumed, softly he began to recite a

quatrain from it, a quatrain of Ling Tai Fu's:

"White is the hibiscus tree with fluttering blossoms, white as they!
But whiter than it is the snow which numbs its roots in the ground!
White are the men of the North as the sun, white as light!
And yet—whiter than white is the leper."



A. E. Coppard

A Broadsheet Ballad

A literary work of art does not depend for its perfection on the number of words the author has used; it depends infinitely more on the unique and subtle alchemy of the author's mind, which transmutes base facts into golden words, transforms something common into something precious. Here, with extraordinary economy, A. E. Coppard, an "outstanding modern master of the short story," gives us a plot idea so brimming with possibilities for expansion, so suggestive of integrated plot and counterplot, that it could easily have been developed into a full-length novel . . . Here, then, is a crime novel in miniature.

AT NOON THE TILER AND THE mason stepped down from the roof of the village church which they were repairing and crossed over the road to the tavern to eat their dinner. It had been a nice little morning, but there were clouds massing in the south. Sam, the tiler, remarked that it looked like thunder. The two men sat in the dim little taproom eating. Bob, the mason, at the same time reading from a newspaper an account of a trial for murder.

"I dunno what thunder looks like," Bob said, "but I reckon this chap is going to be hung, though I can't rightly say for why. To my thinking he didn't do it at all; but murder's a bloody thing and someone ought to suffer for it."

"I don't think," spluttered Sam as he impaled a flat piece of beetroot on the point of a pocket-knife and

prepared to contemplate it with patience until his stuffed mouth was ready, "he ought to be hung."

"There can't be no other end for him though, with a mob of lawyers like that, and a judge like that; and a jury too—why the rope's half round his neck this minute; he'll be in glory within a month, they only have three Sundays, you know, between the sentence and the execution. Well, hark at that rain then!"

A shower that began as a playful sprinkle grew to a powerful steady summer downpour. It splashed in the open window, and the dim room grew more dim and cool.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," continued Sam, "and 'tis often unjust I've no doubt, I've no doubt at all."

"Unjust! I tell you—at the majority of trials those who give their evidence mostly knows nothing at all

about the matter; them as knows a lot—they stays at home and don't budge, not likely!"

"No? But why?"

"Why? They has their reasons. I know that, I knows it for truth—hark at that rain."

They watched the downfall in complete silence for some moments.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," Sam at length repeated, with almost a sigh.

"I can tell you a tale about that, Sam, in a minute," said the other. He began to fill his pipe from Sam's brass box, which was labeled cough lozenges and smelled of paregoric.

"Just about ten years ago I was working over in Cotswold country. I remember I'd been in to Gloucester one Saturday afternoon and it rained. I was jogging along home in a carrier's van; I never seen it rain like that afore, no, nor even afterwards, not like that. B-r-r-r-r! it came down. Bashing! And we come to a crossroads where there's a public-house called the Wheel of Fortune, very lonely and onsheltered it is just there. I see'd a young woman standing in a porch awaiting us, but the carrier was wet and tired and angry or something and wouldn't stop. 'No room,' he bawled out to her, 'full up; can't take you!' and he drove on. 'For the love of God, mate,' I says, 'pull up and take that young creature! She's—she's—can't you see?' 'But I'm all behind as 'tis,' he shouts to me; 'you know your gospel, don't you—time and tide

wait for no man?' 'Ah, but dammit all, they always call for a feller,' I says. With that he turned round and we drove back for the girl. She clumb in and sat on my knees; I squat on a tub of vinegar, there was nowhere else, and I was right and all, she was going on for a birth. Well, the old van rattled away for six or seven miles; whenever it stopped, you could hear the rain clattering on the tarpaulin, or sounding outside on the grass as if it was breathing hard, and the old horse steamed and shivered with it. I had knowed the girl once in a friendly way, a pretty young creature, but now she was white and sorrowful and wouldn't say much. By and by we came to another crossroads near a village, and she got out there. 'Good day, my gal,' I says, affable like, and 'Thank you, sir,' says she—and off she popped in the rain with her umbrella up. A rare pretty girl, quite young, I'd met her before, a girl you could get uncommon fond of, you know, but I didn't meet her afterwards, she was mixed up in a bad business. It all happened in the next six months while I was working round these parts. Everybody knew of it. This girl's name was Edith and she had a younger sister, Agnes. Their father was old Harry Maller-ton, kept the British Oak at North Quainy; he stuttered. Well, this Edith had a love affair with a young chap, William, and having a very loving nature she behaved foolish. Then she couldn't bring the chap

up to the scratch nohow by herself, and of course she was afraid to tell her mother or father: you know how girls are after being so pesky natural, they fear, oh, they do fear! But soon it couldn't be hidden any longer as she was living at home with them all, so she wrote a letter to her mother 'Dear Mother,' she wrote, and told her all about her trouble.

"By all accounts the mother was angry as an old lion, but Harry took it calm like and sent for young William, who'd not come at first. He lived close by in the village, so they went down themselves at last and fetched him.

"All right, yes," he said, "I'll do what's lawful to be done. There you are, I can't say no fairer, that I can't."

"No," they said, "you can't."

"So he kissed the girl and off he went, promising to call in and settle affairs in a day or two. The next day Agnes, which was the younger girl, she also wrote a note to her mother telling her some more strange news.

"'God above!' the mother cried out, 'can it be true, both of you girls, my own daughters, and by the same man! What ever were you thinking on, both of ye! What ever can be done now!'"

"What!" ejaculated Sam, "both on 'em, both on 'em!"

"As true as God's my mercy—both on 'em—same chap. Ah! Mrs. Mallerton was afraid to tell her husband at first, for old Harry was the

devil born again when he were roused up, so she went for young William herself, who'd not come again, of course, not likely. But they made him come, oh yes, when they told the girls' father.

"Well, may I go to my d-d-damnation at once!" roared old Harry—he stuttered, you know—"at once, if that ain't a good one!" So he took off his coat, he took up a stick, he walked down the street to William and cut him off his legs. Then he beat him until he howled for his mercy, and you couldn't stop old Harry once he were roused up—he was the devil born again. They do say as he beat him for a solid hour; I can't say as to that, but then old Harry picked him up and carried him off to the British Oak on his own back and threw him down in his own kitchen between his own two girls like a dead dog. They do say that the little one, Agnes, flew at her father like a raging cat until he knocked her senseless with a clout over head; rough man he was."

"Well, a' called for it, sure," commented Sam.

"Her did," agreed Bob, "but she was the quietest known girl for miles round those parts, very shy and quiet."

"A shady lane breeds mud," said Sam.

"What do you say?—Oh ah!—mud, yes. But pretty girls both, girls you could get very fond of, skin like apple bloom, and as like as two pinks they were. They had to decide which

of them William was to marry."

"Of course, ah!"

"I'll marry Agnes," says he.

"You'll not," says the old man.
"You'll marry Edie."

"No I won't," William says; "it's Agnes I love and I'll be married to her or I won't be married to e'er of 'em.' All the time Edith sat quiet, dumb as a shovel, never a word, crying a bit; but they do say the young one went on like —like a—"

"The jezebel!" commented Sam.

"You may say it; but wait, my man, just wait. Another cup of beer. We can't go back to church until this humbugging rain have stopped."

"No, that we can't."

"It's my belief the 'bugging rain won't stop this side of four o'clock."

"And if the roof don't hold it off, it 'ull spoil they Lord's commandments that's just done up on the chancel front."

"Oh, they be dry by now." Bob spoke reassuringly and then continued his tale. "I'll marry Agnes or I won't marry nobody," William says, and they couldn't budge him. No, old Harry cracked on, but he wouldn't have it, and at last Harry says: "It's like this." He pulls a half-crown out of his pocket and 'Heads it's Agnes,' he says, 'or tails it's Edith,' he says."

"Never! Ha! Ha!" cried Sam.

"Heads it's Agnes, tails it's Edie, so help me God. And it come down Agnes, yes, heads it was—Agnes—and so there they were."

"And they lived happy ever after?"

"Happy! You don't know your human nature, Sam; where ever was you brought up? 'Heads it's Agnes,' said old Harry, and at that Agnes flung her arms round William's neck and was for going off with him then and there, ha! But this is how it happened about that. William hadn't any kindred, he was a lodger in the village, and his landlady wouldn't have him in her house one mortal hour when she heard of it; give him the right-about there and then. He couldn't get lodgings anywhere else, nobody would have anything to do with him, so of course, for safety's sake, old Harry had to take him, and there they all lived together at the British Oak—all in one happy family. But they girls couldn't bide the sight of each other, so their father cleaned up an old outhouse in his yard that was used for carts and hens and put William and his Agnes out in it. And there they had to bide. They had a couple of chairs, a sofa, and a bed and that kind of thing, and the young one made in quite snug."

"Twas a hard thing for that other, that Edie, Bob."

"It was hard, Sam, in a way, and all this was happening just afore I met her in the carrier's van. She was very sad and solemn then; a pretty girl, one you could like. Ah, you may choke me, but there they lived together. Edie never opened her lips to either of them again, and her

father sided with her, too. What was worse, it came out after the marriage that Agnes was quite free of trouble—it was only a trumped-up game between her and this William because he fancied her better than the other one. And they never had no child, them two, though when poor Edie's mischance came along I be damned if Agnes weren't fonder of it than its own mother, a jolly sight more fonder, and William—he fair worshipped it."

"You don't say!"

"I do. 'Twas a rum go, that, and Agnes worshipped it, a fact, can prove it by scores o' people to this day, scores, in them parts. William and Agnes worshipped it, and Edie—she just looked on, 'long of it all, in the same house with them, though she never opened her lips again to her young sister to the day of her death."

"Ah, she died? Well, it's the only way out of such a tangle, poor woman."

"You're sympathizing with the wrong party." Bob filled his pipe again from the brass box; he ignited it with deliberation; going to the open window, he spat into a puddle in the road. "The wrong party, Sam; 'twas Agnes that died. She was found on the sofa one morning stone-dead, dead as a adder."

"God bless me!" murmured Sam.

"Poisoned!" added Bob, puffing serenely.

"Poisoned!"

Bob repeated the word "poi-

soned." "This was the way of it," he continued. "One morning the mother went out in yard to collect her eggs, and she began calling out: 'Edie, Edie, here a minute, come and look where that hen have laid her egg; I would never have believed it,' she says. And when Edie went out, her mother led her round the back of the outhouse, and there on the top of a wall this hen had laid an egg. 'I would never have believed it, Edie,' she says; 'scooped out a nest there beautiful, ain't she? I wondered where her was laying. 'Tother morning the dog brought an egg round in his mouth and laid it on the doormat. There now, Aggie, Aggie, here a minute, come and look where the hen have laid that egg.' And as Aggie didn't answer, the mother went in and found her on the sofa in the outhouse, stone-dead."

"How'd they account for it?" asked Sam after a pondering awhile.

"That's what brings me to the point about that young feller that's going to be hung," said Bob, tapping the newspaper that lay upon the bench. "I don't know what would lie between two young women in a wrangle of that sort; some would get over it quick, but some would never sleep soundly any more, not for a minute of their mortal lives. Edie must have been one of that sort. There's people living there now as could tell a lot if they'd a mind to it. Some knowed all about it, could tell you the very shop

where Edie managed to get hold of the poison and could describe to me or to you just how she administrated it in a glass of barley water. Old Harry knew all about it, he knew all about everything, but he favored Edith and he never budged a word. Clever old chap was Harry, and nothing came out against Edie at the inquest—nor the trial neither."

"Was there a trial, then?"

"There was a kind of a trial. Naturally. A beautiful trial. The police came and fetched poor William. They took him away and in due course he was hanged."

"William! But what had he got to do with it?"

"Nothing. It was rough on him, but he hadn't played straight and so nobody struck up for him. They made out a case against him—there was some onlucky bit of evidence which I'll take my oath old Harry knew something about—and William was done for. Ah, when things take a turn against you it's as certain as twelve o'clock, when they take a

turn; you get no more chance than a rabbit from a weasel. It's like dropping your matches into a stream, you needn't waste the bending of your back to pick them out—they're no good on, they'll never strike again. And Edith, she sat in court through it all, very white and trembling and sorrowful, and when the judge put his black cap on, they do say she blushed and looked across at William and gave a bit of a smile. Well, she had to suffer for his doings, so why shouldn't he suffer for hers? That's how I look at it."

"But God-a-mighty—I!"

"Yes, God-a-mighty knows. Pretty girls they were, both, and as like as two pinks."

There was quiet for some moments while the tiler and the mason emptied their cups of beer. "I think," said Sam then, "the rain's give over now."

"Ah, that it has," cried Bob. "Let's go and do a bit more on this church or she won't be done afore Christmas."



Hugh Pentecost

Room Number 23

Believe it or not, "Room Number 23" is Hugh Pentecost's "first story" —a "first story" to rank with James Yaffe's "Department of Impossible Crimes," Leonard Thompson's "Squeeze Play," and Stanley Ellin's contemporary classic, "The Specialty of the House." And this remarkable "first story" not only accepts the always fascinating challenge of the "locked room," it offers a solution which, conceived a generation ago, is still fresh and satisfying today . . . Cheers!

I FIRST MET JAMES BELLAMY DURING the war and was immediately conscious that he was a remarkable fellow. He was young, scarcely twenty-five, yet he had written two novels and was an Ace in the Royal Flying Corps.

I had not been as fortunate as some others in my war experience.

When the United States went in, I tried to enlist, but discovered that I had a "leaky valve," or some such tommyrot. I finally got into a Red Cross unit, and it was at a field hospital that I ran across James Bellamy. He had come in to have an infected hand dressed and he was much disgruntled at having to give up flying for a week because of so small an injury.

One afternoon while he was there I had to go to the other side of the town for something, and Bellamy offered to go with me. He was a striking figure as he walked down the shell-riddled street in his handsome uniform, twirling a little cane.

We said nothing, as we scarcely knew each other, and Bellamy was just a little too reserved to inspire loquacity. Before we had reached our destination, a heavy fire of enemy shells began dropping about us and we realized that at any minute we might be blown to bits. I was frightened silly, but Bellamy appeared entirely unmoved.

He sauntered along whistling a little tune and twiddling his stick. He looked at me and his eyes twinkled humorously. If I looked half as frightened as I was I must have been a sorry sight.

"I say, old bean," said Bellamy, "if we've got to die, let's die like gentlemen. Nothing like adopting the proper pose under such circumstances. Pose is all that counts in life." And he offered me a cigarette.

I took one and he held a match for me with steady hands.

"Do you ever read poetry?" he asked.

We continued to our destination

discussing poets. Bellamy's utter indifference, at least externally, to the exploding shells was infectious, and I soon found that my pretense of bravery had actually made me forget my fear to a large extent.

The next day I had a few hours to myself, and Bellamy and I went to a little wine shop which had escaped destruction. He ordered Scotch whisky and soda, and I joined him. We continued our discussion of poetry. I found that he was intensely fascinated by all the romanticists in literature, and I confess it surprised me.

Bellamy's air of cynicism had led me to suspect entirely different tastes. I asked him about it. He sat puffing at his pipe for a few moments before he answered.

"It's because I like liars," he said at last. "Lying is dying out altogether too swiftly, and if I get through this fracas I shall devote my time to perfecting the Art of Lying."

"Explain," I said.

"Why, my dear fellow, we can see the hardships and horrors of life on every hand. Why, when we go to literature for entertainment must we read about obvious things? I hate these modern realists. They have no imaginations, so they must write about what they see. But the true artist doesn't care about what he sees, he only cares about what he'd like to see. Personally, aside from literature, I believe the truth is a bad habit.

"If you tell the truth you are sure

to be found out sooner or later. If you don't tell the truth you amuse your friends a great deal more, and it is much more stimulating to yourself."

"Don't you ever tell the truth?" I asked.

"Only when it is so improbable that no one will believe it," he replied.

The next day Bellamy went back to his post and I didn't see him again. The armistice came and I found myself back in New York. I was fortunate in being able to get back my job on the *Republican*.

I had been reporting for them when war was declared. Donaldson, the managing editor, soon discovered that the war had developed in me a rather keen power of observation and he began sending me out on gruesome leads. I found myself covering all the important and unimportant crimes committed in and about the city.

One morning I was walking up the avenue when I saw the resplendent figure of a man coming toward me from the opposite direction. He was dressed in a smartly cut dark blue suit, with vest and spats of a lighter color. He wore a slouch hat pulled down at a rakish angle, and smoked a cigarette through a long amber holder. He was twirling a malacca walking-stick carelessly. Something about the way he carried that stick was familiar to me.

"Bellamy!" I cried, as he came

abreast. "How the devil are you?"

He looked somewhat bewildered for a moment.

"I say, if it isn't old Renshaw," he drawled.

We shook hands heartily.

"What are you doing with yourself?" I asked.

"Idling, old bean, idling. It's the only profession left open for a gentleman. And you?"

"Unfortunately I have a bestial appetite," I said, "I must work to feed it. I'm reporting for the *Republican*. I'm a journalist."

"Journalist sounds better than reporter," he drawled. "Always put your best foot forward."

"Idling seems to agree with you," I said. "You look exceedingly prosperous."

"As a matter of fact, I have exactly thirty cents to my name," he said.

"Still lying?" I asked suspiciously.

"No. This is one of the times when it is unlikely that you'll believe the truth."

"You really mean you're that hard up?" I asked.

"Well, I've got some duds, furniture and the like, stored away. I'm looking for some simple soul who will supply an apartment and let me supply the furnishings. Some young fellow ought to jump at the chance to live with me. I would be a liberal education to him."

"Are you serious?" I demanded.

"Quite, old bean."

"Well, I'm your man," I said.

"I've been looking for some one to share with me and I should be delighted to have you."

He tapped the curbing with his cane thoughtfully before answering.

"Can't tell when I'll have any money," he said shortly.

"That's all right. When you get it will be time enough to worry about that."

"I shall be devilish cross at times. When I'm writing I'm a bear."

"I understand," I said. "Besides, I shall scarcely be in except to sleep and for breakfast."

"I have a gilt angel in a frame and a set of Casanova that I should insist on having around," he said doubtfully.

"Suits me," I said.

He looked up at me with his rare but charming smile.

"I say, this is bully," he said. "You're sure you mean it?"

"Absolutely."

The next few days were hectic—I was at work all day for the *Republican* and in the evenings Bellamy and I fussed about trying to settle the little apartment on Gramercy Park. Bellamy's furnishings were really lovely, and at the end of the week we had a place that was perfect.

The apartment was in one of those old remodeled houses, and was blessed with a fireplace in the high ceilinged living-room. Two great windows looked out over the park, and Bellamy had put a comfortable chair by each window. A heavy oak

table stood in the center of the room and a couch was backed up against it, facing the fireplace.

Our first night at home we felt like kings. Bellamy, wrapped in a well worn dressing-gown, sat before a little blaze in the hearth and smoked his pipe thoughtfully. He had just filled it from a red can which bore the name of an English tobacconist.

"What kind of tobacco do you smoke?" he asked, seeing me take my pipe and pouch from the mantelpiece.

"Hampshire," I said.

"Try some of this," he suggested, handing me the red can.

I filled my pipe and lit it. He watched me speculatively.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"It's very smooth," I said.

"How does it compare with Hampshire?"

"Well, it's much smoother," I said, puffing carefully. "It has a quality which a more expensive tobacco is bound to have."

Bellamy chuckled.

"That shows the unreliability of the senses," he said. "That's Hampshire you're smoking. I just keep it in this can because there's a little sponge in the top that keeps it moist."

The next morning, when I got to the office, the chief sent me out on a new case. Something had happened at the old Nathan Hotel, and I was to investigate. The Nathan is one

of the landmarks of a society which once centered about Washington Square, but which has since migrated uptown.

Nothing of its ancient splendor remains, except the fine courtesy of employees and the clientele of old New Yorkers depressed in fortune. One could still get a delicious chicken and waffle supper there, the fame of which had lasted through a century. It was not the sort of place where one expected to find a crime of any sort.

But there had been a crime at the Nathan, at least the police thought there had been. It was a very odd thing. A Miss Wilson and her brother Robert had put up there for the night. The Wilsons' father had been one of the Nathan's old customers, and his children, who lived out of town, stayed there when in the city.

With the Wilsons on this occasion was a private detective named Herbert Horton. The reason for the detective's presence was this: Miss Wilson had been left a considerable fortune in jewels by an aunt, recently deceased. These jewels had been left with the family lawyer and Miss Wilson and her brother had come to get them.

It seems that they had insisted against the lawyer's advice, on taking the jewels with them to their home in Stamford. It was late in the afternoon when they left the lawyer's office, too late to deposit them in a safety vault, and too late to get

home without being swallowed in the crush.

The Wilsons had decided to stay at the Nathan for the night and take an early train home in the morning. The lawyer, feeling that the whole procedure was a bit rash, had finally persuaded them to let Horton, the detective, accompany them and see that nothing happened to the jewels.

They had no trouble in getting three rooms at the Nathan. These rooms were on the sixth floor, which, by the way, was the top. The rooms were adjoining, though not connecting, and they looked out over the avenue. The numbers of these rooms were Twenty-One, Twenty-Three and Twenty-Five. Miss Wilson had the center room, with Horton in Twenty-One, and Robert Wilson in Twenty-Five.

When they had got settled in their rooms, Miss Wilson had decided she wanted some tea. Her brother had some letters to write and refused to go down. Miss Wilson left the jewels with him and went down to the old bar, which had been converted into a tea room. Horton remained in his room.

The clerk at the desk saw Miss Wilson go into the tea room, and about half an hour later he saw her go upstairs again. A chambermaid working in the hall saw her get off the elevator at the sixth floor and go to her room. Almost immediately there was a loud scream, apparently from Miss Wilson's room.

The maid stood terrified, staring at the door of Twenty-Three. Horton rushed out of his room and Wilson out of his. They hammered on the door of Twenty-three. They called Miss Wilson, but there was no answer. The door was locked. Horton turned and saw the chambermaid.

He asked her if she had seen Miss Wilson go into her room and she said she had. They redoubled their cries but to no avail. Wilson finally grabbed a fire ax from the wall and soon demolished the door. Horton rushed in, revolver in hand, and stopped on the threshold, amazed. Wilson stared over his shoulder.

The room was absolutely undisturbed. It was empty. Miss Wilson's coat and other articles hung in the closet. Everything was just as it must have been when she left the room. The window was locked on the inside.

Horton concluded that they had made a mistake, despite the chambermaid's evidence, and that the cry had come from someone else. Wilson went down to see if his sister was still in the tea room.

He came back shortly, white-faced, and told Horton what the clerk had seen. This clerk swore that he had just seen Miss Wilson go upstairs. The Wilsons had often stopped at the hotel, he couldn't be mistaken. Then they questioned the chambermaid.

She had seen Miss Wilson go into her room. She described Miss Wilson

perfectly. There could be no doubt about it.

Horton examined the room carefully. He unlocked and opened the window. There was no means of egress that way. It was a straight drop of six stories to the street. There was no cornice around the building on which any one could walk. Escape by the window was impossible.

There was absolutely no exit from that room except the door, and Miss Wilson hadn't come out of the door. There was no sign of a struggle, nothing to indicate that anything unusual had happened. Yet Miss Wilson had gone into that room, had screamed, hadn't come out, and yet wasn't there.

Horton hinted at foul play, but there was nothing to indicate that such a thing had happened. It seemed that it must have been some peculiar mistake. Miss Wilson couldn't have gone into that room or she'd be there now. They finally concluded that, despite all evidence to the contrary, Miss Wilson hadn't come up, that she had stepped out of the hotel for something.

They waited for her return. But she didn't come back. All night they waited, and during this time the clerk and the maid persisted that what they had said was true. About four in the morning Horton summoned the police.

The police examined the witnesses and the room with the same result. There could be no question of a

murder. It was simply a mysterious disappearance. That the girl had gone against her will seemed apparent, inasmuch as she certainly wouldn't have gone off of her own volition without telling her brother.

Immediately a wide-spread search was organized. Every policeman in New York was supplied with a description of Miss Wilson. But nothing happened.

When I finally returned to the *Republican* office to write my story the only additional evidence of any sort was a corroboration of the evidence given by the clerk and the chambermaid. The elevator boy testified that he took Miss Wilson—describing her—up at the time the clerk said he saw her.

He remembered the time because he went off duty at six o'clock. In fact, Miss Wilson was the last passenger he had carried.

But the police obstinately refused to believe that Miss Wilson had ever returned to her room. With a certain sort of stolid logic, they argued that if she had returned she would be there now. No, Miss Wilson was somewhere about the city.

Perhaps some accident, a coincidence under the circumstances, had occurred and Miss Wilson was in a hospital. Every accident ward in the city was searched, but no trace of the missing girl was found.

My own personal opinion was that this was just another of those queer

disappearances that always have a logical explanation when the lost person turns up. I could not believe, as the police did, that Miss Wilson's disappearance was involuntary. But then, unlike the police, I believed that the girl had returned to her room.

The evidence of those three people was, to my mind, conclusive. One person might make a mistake, but not three. Therefore, since there was no sign of any sort of a struggle, it seemed probable to me that for some inexplicable reason the girl had left the hotel of her own accord. The only thing I couldn't explain was the scream.

If Miss Wilson wanted to get away unnoticed, why did she scream? What was the cause of that scream? Horton, Wilson and the chambermaid all described it as unquestionably a scream of terror. What was the meaning of it?

I finished my article and walked uptown toward Gramercy Park. Though I was very tired, I wanted some fresh air.

It was after midnight when I got to our apartment and I found that Bellamy had already turned in. I went quietly to bed, but it was not to be for long. I was awakened about three by the frantic ring of the phone. It was the editor of the *Republican*.

"Run over to the Nathan," he ordered. "They've found that girl —murdered," he added after a pause.

"Good God," I cried. "Where did they find her?"

"The body was hidden behind some ash barrels in the basement," said the editor. "The hotel porter discovered it accidentally. Shake a leg and get over there. I'm holding up the presses of the next edition for your story."

I began to dress hurriedly, without making any attempt to be quiet. Bellamy came out of his room, wrapped in his long bath robe.

"Devil of a thing to wake up a fellow at this hour," he grumbled. "Never can get to sleep again after I awaken. What's up?"

I told him briefly.

"What are the facts of the case?" he asked, stretching himself out on the couch.

I told him, finishing the narrative as I was putting on my hat to go out.

"Are all the police reporters such fools as you?" he asked.

It was his way of asking a question, like the old legal trick of inquiring of the defendant if he has "Given up beating his wife." An answer either way is an indictment.

There was little to learn at the Nathan besides what the night editor had told me. William Graham, a porter at the Nathan, had made a cache of a bottle of Scotch behind some ash barrels in the cellar. When he reached behind the barrels for his forbidden treasure his hand touched the corpse.

He speedily notified the police,

and when I reached the Nathan I found that a special officer had been sent down to question Graham.

This officer was a rather intelligent fellow named Milliken. He got the porter's story from him and was about to dismiss him when Graham, with a puzzled frown, asked if he might add something to the evidence.

"There's something I'd like to tell, sir," he said, "but in telling you I have to confess to a crime myself. If you'll agree not to prosecute me I can tell you something valuable."

Milliken looked at him shrewdly.

"What sort of a crime have you committed?" he asked.

"You won't pull me in?"

"No. Spill it," demanded the officer shortly.

"Well, sir," began Graham, and he actually blushed, "I'm a bootlegger!" Milliken scowled blackly at some of us who laughed. Graham went on, somewhat hesitantly: "I was in the habit, sir, of keeping a case of liquor back of them barrels. The night that the young girl disappeared, last night, I had some customers.

"They came into the cellar for a case of gin I had for them. What I'm getting at is, that I had that case of gin back of them barrels, right where I found the young girl. She wasn't there, sir, yesterday at this time. What's more she wasn't there this afternoon, that is, yesterday afternoon, strictly speaking.

"I put a bottle of Scotch there

about five o'clock when I came on duty. She wasn't there then, sir. That girl was put there, sir, some time between five last night and half-past two this morning."

Milliken smoked a cigarette thoughtfully.

"You'd swear to that, Graham? You'd swear she wasn't there last night at five o'clock? That means that the body was put there at least twenty-four hours *after* she disappeared."

"Yes, sir."

"Could anyone get into the basement without you seeing him?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes, sir. The basement's a big place. I wasn't near them barrels after five o'clock until I found the young girl."

That was all the porter's evidence. But it made the case more difficult than ever. The police now switched their opinion about Miss Wilson's having gone to her room. There never had been any doubt in my mind. She had gone to her room, some one hiding in the room had struck her down, and had escaped himself, *with the body!*

Miss Wilson must have seen her assailant before he struck her, for she had screamed. But how, by all that's wonderful, had they got out of that room? There simply wasn't any way to get out except by the door, and there hadn't been any escape that way.

The chambermaid had been watching, and Horton and young

Wilson had come out of their rooms almost immediately as they heard the scream. There had been less than three minutes before they broke in the door. Three minutes in which the murderer escaped with the body. Then, a day later, this murderer had come from wherever he had been hiding and put the body back of those ash barrels.

"The queer part of it is," said Milliken, "that he couldn't have been hiding in the hotel. Mr. Horton and I searched every square inch of it the day after the disappearance. He must have hidden outside somewhere and brought the body back to the hotel last night."

The whole problem was getting too deep for me, and I hurried back to the *Republican* to get an article into the breakfast-table edition. As I reassembled the facts I became more puzzled. A girl is waylaid, probably in an attempt to rob her of the jewels which she didn't have. She screams, and the robber strikes her down. The cause of her death had been a shattering blow on the head.

Then, in three minutes' time, the murderer escapes with his victim from a room from which escape is impossible. He drags the body somewhere outside the hotel, and then, a day later, brings it back and hides it in the basement.

After writing my article I returned once more to Gramercy Park to freshen up. I found Bellamy still stretched out on the couch. He had

been smoking a great deal, for the carpet was littered with ashes.

He looked a little pale from his sleepless night. The coffee percolator was bubbling on the table, and the smell of it made me realize that I was ravishingly hungry.

"I was just about to throw together some bacon and eggs," said Bellamy. "You're just in time. What happened?"

I told him between gasps, as I drenched my face and head with cold water from the basin. He lay there, smoking, a queer smile on his face.

"Look here," I said when I had dried my face and hands, "I didn't have time to take up your parting jab this morning. What the devil do you mean by insinuating that I was a fool?"

"Did I insinuate that?" he drawled.

"Yes," I said. "You asked me if all police reporters were such fools as I."

"Did I? Well, perhaps they are. Crime is usually so elemental, the kindergarten of emotions, and you fellows make such a hullabaloo about it. It's ridiculous."

"If you have some brilliant solution to this Wilson business," I said dryly, "explode it. Every poet thinks he knows a devil of a lot about humanity. Suppose you explain this puzzle."

"It looks so simple to me," said Bellamy, "but of course I can't be sure. However, answer these questions if you can."

"Shoot," I said.

"First," said Bellamy, tapping down the ashes in his pipe, "Let us get the scene straight. Miss Wilson has a very valuable lot of jewels. They are obviously worth an attempted robbery. But did Miss Wilson publish the fact in the papers that she had them?"

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

"Just this, old bean. Either it was a coincidence, and some common burglar, a sneak thief hanging about the hotel corridors, chanced into Miss Wilson's room and, being surprised, killed her, or it was not a coincidence, and someone who knew about those jewels was the murderer.

"Now, the people who knew about those jewels were comparatively few. They were her brother and Horton, who were with her, the lawyer who gave them to her, and perhaps one or two of his office force. Now, my dear Renshaw, what do you say? Was it one of these, or was it just a chance burglar?"

"Most likely a chance burglar," I said.

"Very well. Question number two: the police and the reporters have been able to find no exit from that room but the door. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there is another exit, which I hasten to assure you that I don't believe, do you think that, with Horton and Wilson banging on that door with a fire-ax, he would stop to drag off the lifeless body of his victim?"

"Remember, we are presuming that it was a chance burglar who knew nothing of the jewels. Someone who knew about the jewels might have thought Miss Wilson had them on her person and made the effort to get the body out with him for further search. But do you think even this is probable?"

I admitted that I didn't.

"Question number three," drawled Bellamy. "Presuming that we are wrong about this and that the murderer did drag the body out with him—out of the hotel, mind you, for the police searched every nook and cranny the day after the disappearance, and she wasn't in the hotel—presuming, I say, that he did drag the body out of the hotel, and concealed it in safety somewhere, which is presuming a great deal, can you by any stretch of imagination conceive of his returning the next day with the body and concealing it in the hotel?"

"No, I can't."

"The fourth question is very simple, but to my mind quite pertinent. Presuming that all this happened, can you imagine that in the struggle which took place in Room Twenty-Three, the falling body, the dragging of that body out of the room through the unknown exit—which doesn't exist—nothing would have been disturbed—no chair misplaced, no rumpled carpet—nothing?"

"Frankly, I can't," I admitted.

"Now one more point," he said, "We have been imagining that all

this was done by a chance burglar. Is it any more likely that one who knew about the jewels would do these things?"

"No," I said, "it isn't."

Bellamy rose from the couch and pulled the plug out of the coffee percolater.

"Me for some breakfast," he said.

"But the solution?" I cried. "All you've done is to make it seem more difficult than ever."

Bellamy smiled. "You'll admit," he said, "that none of these suppositions we have made are possible. Therefore an entirely different set of circumstances must have attended the crime. Use your head, old bean, use your head. I'm for a little bacon and eggs, and then I'm going to write a sonnet about the mayor."

"But you can't leave me in the air this way," I complained.

Bellamy wandered toward the kitchenette to cook his eggs.

"Look up the Wilsons' family history," he suggested. "Family histories are always interesting at a time like this."

And Bellamy would say no more, though I pestered him all through breakfast. I went back to the office then and wrote another article in which I embodied all of Bellamy's questions.

My chief was much pleased and wanted me to continue with a theory as to what actually happened. I couldn't do that, as I hadn't the vaguest notion about it.

I did follow Bellamy's advice, however, and found out what I could about the Wilsons. When I got home that night I told Bellamy what I had discovered.

"They are a family who once had means," I told him. "The father died about three years ago and left nothing but a mass of debts. The girl took a position as private secretary to some man, and Robert Wilson went on the stage. From what I could find out at his club, he is a man of good habits, though usually rather badly in debt."

Bellamy nodded. "Just as I thought," he said cryptically.

"And you have solved the riddle?"

"Been working on the mayor all day," he said. "I knew the solution this morning."

"Good Heavens," I cried, "if you really have any idea of what happened, you ought to tell me. The murderer may be making good his escape."

Bellamy thought for a moment.

"There is just one fact which might scatter my theory to the four winds," he said, "but I'm inclined to think that fact doesn't exist."

"What is that fact?" I asked.

"Were the rooms of Herbert Horton and Robert Wilson searched when the police were looking through the hotel for the body?"

"I see what you are driving at," I said excitedly. "You think the murderer might actually have concealed the body in one of those

rooms while Wilson, Horton, and the police were searching the premises!

"Of course the police didn't bother to search those rooms because they knew that they had been occupied by the girl's brother and their own detective when the murderer was committed. I think you've hit it," I concluded jubilantly.

"I didn't mean that at all," said Bellamy, "or at least not the way you think I did."

He sat smoking a minute, and then turned to me; and I saw his eyes were unusually bright.

"Renshaw," he said, "you know how absolutely worthless evidence of the visual sort is. I mean one can't count on the eye of a witness. It's been tried over and over again. A whole roomful of men will be asked to describe a pantomime which has been enacted before them, and no two of them will give the same answer.

"You know that a witness may swear to having seen something, swear honestly, that never happened at all."

"That's true."

"Bear in mind, then, old bean, that the chambermaid's testimony was absolutely false, although she thinks she has told the truth."

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"Wait—tell me, Renshaw, why do the police never believe their own conclusions? They say in this case that there is no possible means of escape from Room Twenty-Three except the door, yet they are trying

to find out how Miss Wilson's murderer got out of that room. Renshaw, if there is no way out of that room but the door, *then the murderer never got out.*"

"What do you mean, he was hidden in there? That's impossible, they searched the room immediately they got in."

"I mean," said Bellamy slowly, "*that he never was in that room.*"

"Look here," I said, laughing, "I thought you were being serious."

"That's the trouble with you duffers," said Bellamy with unwanted sharpness, "you haven't the brains to accept the truth. You sit by, in this instance, and solemnly assert that the murderer couldn't have escaped from Room Twenty-Three, and when I tell you he didn't, you scoff at it. Work out your own solution! You'll never find the truth, if you spend all your time contradicting yourself."

"Oh, come, Bellamy, don't be offended," I said. "I thought you were joking. You must admit it sounds ridiculous to say that the murderer didn't escape from the room in which the murder was committed and then that he never was in that room!"

Bellamy smiled.

"Sorry, old bean. I get awfully bored with pigheadedness at moments. But, see here, I said that the murderer wasn't in Room Twenty-Three. The reason he wasn't there was because *the murder wasn't committed in Room Twenty-Three.*"

"Bellamy!" I ejaculated.

Bellamy paused and filled his pipe.

"Thanks for not laughing at that one," he said dryly as he lit his pipe. "Let me get down to what actually happened," he continued, and I detected an unusual enthusiasm in his tone. His eyes were glowing and he twined and untwined his long fingers nervously.

"Look at the scene, Renshaw. Three rooms stand next to each other in the corridor. A chambermaid is cleaning up in the hall. A young girl gets off the elevator and goes to her room. The maid only casually notices this. But when a loud scream is heard the maid looks up, panic-stricken. For a moment she doubts which room the girl entered.

"There are a dozen similar doors in the corridor. However, she is soon made certain that it was Number Twenty-Three since the gentlemen who have the rooms on either side of Twenty-Three rush out and bang on that door. Then comes the excitement of breaking into the room. It was found empty. Horton turns to the maid and asks her if she saw Miss Wilson go into Room Twenty-Three.

"She swears that she did. But she didn't, Renshaw! She didn't! The thing that made her certain that Miss Wilson *had* entered Twenty-Three was that Horton and Wilson came out and banged on *that* door. Could anything be more natural?"

"It still isn't quite clear," I said. Bellamy smiled tolerantly. "Listen, old bean, Miss Wilson never went into Twenty-Three. She went either into Horton's room or her brother's. One of those two men attacked her for some reason and killed her. Just before the attack Miss Wilson screamed.

"The murderer had great presence of mind, a presence of mind bordering on genius. Instead of trying to escape he rushes out into the hall—after pushing the body under the bed, say—and bangs on the door that Miss Wilson *ought to have entered*.

"The guiltless man, I won't say which he is for the moment, naturally supposed that the other fellow was acting on the same impulse as himself. He had heard the scream which he suspected came from Miss Wilson. The guiltless man was completely disarmed, never suspected for a moment.

"The chambermaid might have given the whole game away had she carefully noticed which room the girl entered, but she hadn't noticed carefully. When the two men came out and banged on the door of Twenty-Three she thought she was certain, only thought she was certain."

"But, Bellamy," I cried, "which one is it?"

Bellamy leaned forward. He seemed to be thrilled by his own reasoning. He was as excited as a schoolboy.

"What would have made that maid certain about the room?" he asked. "Remember, the evidence of the eyes is not certain, but there is another kind of evidence which is more reliable. The ear, Renshaw, the ear! What might she have heard that would have made her certain about the room?"

"I give up," I said.

"A knock," said Bellamy. "If Miss Wilson had knocked on the door the maid would have looked up, waiting to see who let her in. It was because she *didn't knock* that the murderer has escaped so far and been able to make it seem that the murder took place in Room Twenty-Three.

"But it is because she didn't knock that we can pick the guilty man with absolute certainty. Come, Renshaw, surely you see it now? Which is it Horton or Wilson?"

"I give up," I said. "My mind is whirling round like a pinwheel."

"So simple," chuckled Bellamy. "It was her brother, of course. If she had gone into Horton's room, she would have knocked! Don't you see? But she walked into her brother's room without a word. Have I convinced you, old bean?"

"But why—why would her brother kill her?"

"Ah, that's not in my province," said Bellamy, stretching contentedly.

"I have delivered the murderer to you, now you find out why he did it."

Bellamy was right. I took his

theory to Milliken and explained the process of reasoning. He was thunderstruck that it had never occurred to him.

Wilson, when confronted with the crime, broke down and confessed everything. He had been heavily in debt.

When his sister had left the jewels with him he had decided to extract some of them from the box and pawn them. But the box was locked and his sister had the key. He had been in the act of prying it open when she walked into his room unannounced. She argued with him and in a fit of passion he struck her down with his walking-stick, a stout piece of Irish thorn.

She had screamed just before he struck her. He knew this scream would attract attention. His mind worked very fast. He pushed his sister's body under the bed and rushed out into the hall. He was startled when he saw the maid, and still more frightened when Horton questioned her, but his ruse had worked.

The only problem that remained was to get the body out of his room. The police searched the hotel from garret to cellar the first day, all except his room and Horton's. There was no thread of suspicion against them. After this rigorous search and failure to find any trace of the girl, the police activities were largely outside the hotel.

He took a chance on the second night and carried his sister's body to

the freight elevator, which he manipulated himself. He hid the body back of the ash barrels. He was undetected and apparently free from danger.

The police force very generously gave me the credit for the solution which I, in turn, tried to shift to Bellamy. He refused to take any credit, saying his reputation as a

poet would be seriously damaged if it became known that he was an amateur detective.

I have written this story now, several years later, since Bellamy's fame in the field of crime has spread far and wide, and I think it only right that he should receive his due in the famous mystery of Room Number Twenty-Three.



George Bernard Shaw

The Miraculous Revenge; or, *The Grave of Brimstone Billy*

In the six preceding annual and semi-annual paperback anthologies we gave you stories of crime and detection by such distinguished literary figures as W. Somerset Maugham, John van Druten, Lord Dunsany, André Maurois, Sinclair Lewis, Ferenc Molnár, Arthur Miller, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack London, Louis Bromfield, O. Henry, J. B. Priestley, James Thurber—and now, a sort of culmination—George Bernard Shaw, and his strange tale of a “sane investigator, acute observer, and capital detective” with, surely, one of the strangest character names ever to appear in print—Mr. Zeno Legge. And how shall we describe the great GBS’s novelet? It is, in a minor way, a tale of detection, and in an equally minor way, a tale of crime; but primarily, it is a tale of revenge—fanatical, fantastic revenge. It is also, at times, a moody, gloomy tale—a tale of darkness and shadows and moonlight—a somber, morbid tale—a tale of graves and ghouls and gruesome geography—a tale of madness and mystery and miracles . . . Resist it if you can!

I ARRIVED IN DUBLIN ON THE evening of the 5th of August, and drove to the residence of my uncle, the Cardinal Archbishop. He is, like most of my family, deficient in feeling, and consequently cold to me personally. He lives in a dingy house, with a side-long view of the portico of his cathedral from the front windows, and of a monster national school from the back.

My uncle maintains no retinue. The people believe that he is waited upon by angels. When I knocked at the door, an old woman, his only

servant, opened it, and informed me that her master was then officiating in the cathedral, and that he had directed her to prepare dinner for me in his absence.

An unpleasant smell of salt fish made me ask her what the dinner consisted of. She assured me that she had cooked all that could be permitted in His Holiness’ house on a Friday. On my asking her further why on a Friday, she replied that Friday was a fast day. I bade her tell His Holiness that I had hoped to have the pleasure of calling

on him shortly, and drove to a hotel in Sackville Street, where I engaged an apartment and dined.

After dinner I resumed my eternal search—I know not for what: it drives me to and fro like another Cain. I sought in the streets without success. I went to the theatre. The music was execrable, the scenery poor. I had seen the play a month before in London, with the same beautiful artist in the chief part. Two years had passed since, seeing her for the first time, I had hoped that she, perhaps, might be the long-sought mystery. It had proved otherwise.

On this night I looked at her and listened to her for the sake of that bygone hope, and applauded her generously when the curtain fell. But I went out lonely still. When I had supped at a restaurant, I returned to my hotel, and tried to read. In vain. The sound of feet in the corridors as the other occupants of the hotel went to bed distracted my attention from my book.

Suddenly it occurred to me that I had never quite understood my uncle's character. He, father to a great flock of poor and ignorant Irish; an austere and saintly man, to whom livers of hopeless lives daily appealed for help heavenward; who was reputed never to have sent away a troubled peasant without relieving him of his burden by sharing it; whose knees were worn less by the altar steps than by the tears and embraces of the guilty and

wretched: *he* had refused to humor my light extravagances, or to find time to talk with me of books, flowers, and music. Had I not been mad to expect it? Now that I needed sympathy myself, I did him justice. I desired to be with a true-hearted man, and to mingle my tears with his.

I looked at my watch. It was nearly an hour past midnight. In the corridor the lights were out, except one jet at the end. I threw a cloak upon my shoulders, put on a Spanish hat, and left my apartment, listening to the echoes of my measured steps retreating through the deserted passages.

A strange sight arrested me on the landing of the grand staircase. Through an open door I saw the moonlight shining through the windows of a salon in which some entertainment had recently taken place. I looked at my watch again: it was but one o'clock; and yet the guests had departed.

I entered the room, my boots ringing loudly on the waxed boards. On a chair lay a child's cloak and a broken toy. The entertainment had been a children's party. I stood for a time looking at the shadow of my cloaked figure upon the floor, and at the disordered decorations, ghostly in the white light. Then I saw that there was a grand piano, still open, in the middle of the room.

My fingers throbbed as I sat down before it, and expressed all that I felt

in a grand hymn which seemed to thrill the cold stillness of the shadows into a deep hum of probation, and to people the radiance of the moon with angels. Soon there was a stir without too, as if the rapture were spreading abroad. I took up the chant triumphantly with my voice, and the empty salon resounded as though to the thunder of an orchestra.

"Hallo, sir!"

"Confound you, sir—"

"Do you suppose that this—"

"What the deuce—"

I turned; and silence followed. Six men, partially dressed, and with dishevelled hair, stood regarding me angrily. They all carried candles. One of them had a bootjack, which he held like a truncheon. Another, the foremost, had a pistol. The night porter was behind trembling.

"Sir," said the man with the revolver, coarsely, "may I ask whether you are mad, that you disturb people at this hour with such an unearthly noise?"

"Is it possible that you dislike it?" I replied courteously.

"Dislike it!" said he, stamping with rage. "Why—damn everything—do you suppose we were enjoying it?"

"Take care: he's mad," whispered the man with the bootjack.

I began to laugh. Evidently they did think me mad. Unaccustomed to my habits, and ignorant of music as they probably were, the mistake,

however absurd, was not unnatural. I rose. They came closer to one another; and the night porter ran away.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I am sorry for you. Had you lain still and listened, we should all have been the better and happier. But what you have done, you cannot undo. Kindly inform the night porter that I am gone to visit my uncle, the Cardinal Archbishop. Adieu!"

I strode past them, and left them whispering among themselves. Some minutes later I knocked at the door of the Cardinal's house. Presently a window on the first floor was opened; and the moonbeams fell on a grey head, with a black cap that seemed ashy pale against the unfathomable gloom of the shadow beneath the stone sill.

"Who are you?"

"I am Zeno Legge."

"What do you want at this hour?"

The question wounded me. "My dear uncle," I exclaimed, "I know you do not intend it, but you make me feel unwelcome. Come down and let me in, I beg."

"Go to your hotel," he said sternly. "I will see you in the morning. Good night." He disappeared and closed the window.

I felt that if I let this rebuff pass, I should not feel kindly towards my uncle in the morning, nor, indeed, at any future time. I therefore plied the knocker with my right hand,

and kept the bell ringing with my left until I heard the door-chain rattle within. The Cardinal's expression was grave nearly to moroseness as he confronted me on the threshold.

"Uncle," I cried, grasping his hand, "do not reproach me. Your door is never shut against the wretched. I am wretched. Let us sit up all night and talk."

"You may thank my position and not my charity for your admission, Zeno," he said. "For the sake of the neighbours, I had rather you played the fool in my study than upon my doorstep at this hour. Walk upstairs quietly, if you please. My house-keeper is a hard-working woman: the little sleep she allows herself must not be disturbed."

"You have a noble heart, Uncle. I shall creep like a mouse."

"This is my study," he said, as we entered an ill-furnished den on the second floor. "The only refreshment I can offer you, if you desire any, is a bunch of raisins. The doctors have forbidden you to touch stimulants, I believe."

"By heaven—!" He raised his finger. "Pardon me: I was wrong to swear. But I had totally forgotten the doctors. At dinner I had a bottle of *Graves*."

"Humph! You have no business to be travelling alone. Your mother promised me that Bushy should come over here with you."

"Pshaw! Bushy is not a man of feeling. Besides, he is a coward.

He refused to come with me because I purchased a revolver."

"He should have taken the revolver from you, and kept to his post."

"Why will you persist in treating me like a child, Uncle? I am very impressionable, I grant you; but I have gone round the world alone, and do not need to be dry-nursed through a tour in Ireland."

"What do you intend to do during your stay here?"

I had no plans; and instead of answering I shrugged and looked round the apartment. There was a statuette of the Virgin upon my uncle's desk. I looked at its face, as he was wont to look in the midst of his labors. I saw there eternal peace. The air became luminous with an infinite network of the jewelled rings of Paradise descending in roseate clouds upon us.

"Uncle," I said, bursting into the sweetest tears I had ever shed, "my wanderings are over. I will enter the Church, if you will help me. Let us read together the third part of *Faust*; for I understand it at last."

"Hush; man," he said, half rising with an expression of alarm. "Control yourself."

"Do not let my tears mislead you. I am calm and strong. Quick, let us have Goethe:

"Das Unbeschreibliche,

Hier ist gethan;

Das Ewig-Weibliche,

Zieht uns hinan."

"Come, come. Dry your eyes and

be quiet. I have no library here."

"But I have—in my portmanteau at the hotel," I said, rising. "Let me go for it, I will return in fifteen minutes."

"The devil is in you, I believe. Cannot—"

I interrupted him with a shout of laughter. "Cardinal," I said noisily, "you have become profane; and a profane priest is always the best of good fellows. Let us have some wine; and I will sing you a German beer song."

"Heaven forgive me if I do you wrong," he said, "but I believe God has laid the expiation of some sin on your unhappy head. Will you favor me with your attention for a while? I have something to say to you, and I have also to get some sleep before my hour for rising, which is half-past five."

"My usual hour for retiring—when I retire at all. But proceed. My fault is not inattention, but over-susceptibility."

"Well, then, I want you to go to Wicklow. My reasons—"

"No matter what they may be," said I, rising again. "It is enough that you desire me to go. I shall start forthwith."

"Zeno! Will you sit down and listen to me?"

I sank upon my chair reluctantly. "Ardor is a crime in your eyes; even when it is shown in your service," I said. "May I turn down the light?"

"Why?"

"To bring on my sombre mood,

in which I am able to listen with tireless patience."

"I will turn it down myself."

I thanked him, and composed myself to listen in the shadow. My eyes, I felt, glittered. I was like Poe's raven.

"Now for my reasons for sending you to Wicklow. First, for your own sake. If you stay in town, or in any place where excitement can be obtained by any means, you will be in Swift's Hospital in a week. You must live in the country, under the eye of one upon whom I can depend. And you must have something to do to keep you out of mischief, and away from your music and painting and poetry, which, Sir John Richards writes to me, are dangerous for you in your present morbid state. Second, because I can entrust you with a task which, in the hands of a sensible man, might bring discredit on the Church. In short, I want you to investigate a miracle."

He looked attentively at me. I sat like a statue.

"You understand me?" he said.

"Nevermore," I replied hoarsely. "Pardon me," I added, amused at the trick my imagination had played me, "I understand you perfectly. Proceed."

"I hope you do. Well, four miles distant from the town of Wicklow is a village called Four Mile Water. The resident priest is Father Hickey. You have heard of the miracles at Knock Chapel?"

I winked.

"I did not ask you what you think of them, but whether you have heard of them. I see you have. I need not tell you that even a miracle may do more harm than good to the Church in this country, unless it can be proved so thoroughly that her powerful and jealous enemies are silenced by the testimony of followers of their heresy. Therefore, when I saw in a Wexford newspaper last week a description of a strange manifestation of the Divine Power which was said to have taken place at Four Mile Water, I was troubled in my mind about it.

"So I wrote to Father Hickey, bidding him give me an account of the matter if it were true, and, if not, to denounce from the altar the author of the report, and to contradict it in the paper at once. This is his reply. He says—well, the first part is about Church matters: I need not trouble you with it. He goes on to say—"

"One moment. Is that his own handwriting? It does not look like a man's."

"He suffers from rheumatism in the fingers of his right hand; and his niece, who is an orphan, and lives with him, acts as his amanuensis. Well—"

"Stay. What is her name?"

"Her name? Kate Hickey."

"How old is she?"

"Tush, man, she is only a little girl. If she were old enough to con-

cern you, I should not send you into her way. Have you any more questions to ask about her?"

"None. I can fancy her in a white veil at the rite of confirmation, a type of faith and innocence. Enough of her. What says the Reverend Hickey of the apparitions?"

"They are not apparitions. I will read you what he says. Ahem! In reply to your inquiries concerning the late miraculous event in this parish, I have to inform you that I can vouch for its truth, and that I can be confirmed not only by the inhabitants of the place, who are all Catholics, but by every person acquainted with the former situation of the graveyard referred to, including the Protestant Archdeacon of Baltinglas, who spends six weeks annually in the neighbourhood. The newspaper account is incomplete and inaccurate. The following are the facts:

"About four years ago a man named Wolfe Tone Fitzgerald settled in this village as a farrier. His antecedents did not transpire; and he had no family. He lived by himself; was very careless of his person; and when in his cups, as he often was, regarded the honour neither of God nor man in his conversation. Indeed, if it were not speaking ill of the dead, one might say that he was a dirty, drunken, blasphemous blackguard. Worse again, he was, I fear, an atheist; for he never attended Mass, and gave His Holiness worse language even than he gave

the Queen. I should have mentioned that he was a bitter rebel, and boasted that his grandfather had been out in '98, and his father with Smith O'Brien. At last he went by the name of Brimstone Billy, and was held up in the village as the type of all wickedness.

"You are aware that our graveyard, situated on the north side of the water, is famous throughout the country as the burial place of the nuns of St. Ursula, the hermit of Four Mile Water, and many other holy people. No Protestant has ever ventured to enforce his legal right of interment there, though two have died in the parish within my own recollection.

"Three weeks ago this Fitzgerald died in a fit brought on by drink; and a great hullabaloo was raised in the village when it became known that he would be buried in the graveyard. The body had to be watched to prevent its being stolen and buried at the crossroads. My people were greatly disappointed when they were told I could do nothing to stop the burial, particularly as I of course refused to read any service on the occasion. However, I bade them not interfere; and the interment was effected on the 14th of July, late in the evening, and long after the legal hour. There was no disturbance.

"Next morning, the graveyard was found moved to the south side of the water, with the one newly-filled grave left behind on the north

side; and thus they both remain. The departed saints would not lie with the reprobate. I can testify to it on the oath of a Christian priest; and if this will not satisfy those outside the Church, everyone, as I said before, who remembers where the graveyard was two months ago, can confirm me.

"I respectfully suggest that a thorough investigation into the truth of this miracle be proposed to a committee of Protestant gentlemen. They shall not be asked to accept a single fact on hearsay from my people. The ordnance maps show where the graveyard was; and anyone can see for himself where it is. I need not tell your Eminence what a rebuke this would be to those enemies of the holy Church that have sought to put a stain on her by discrediting the late wonderful manifestations at Knock Chapel. If they come to Four Mile Water, they need cross-examine no one. They will be asked to believe nothing but their own senses.

"Awaiting your Eminence's counsel to guide me further in the matter,

"I am, etc."

"Well, Zeno," said my uncle, "what do you think of Father Hickey now?"

"Uncle, do not ask me. Beneath this roof I desire to believe everything. The Reverend Hickey has appealed strongly to my love of legend. Let us admire the poetry of his narrative, and ignore the balance

of probability between a Christian priest telling a lie on his oath and a graveyard swimming across a river in the middle of the night and forgetting to return."

"Tom Hickey is not telling a lie, sir. You may take my word for that. But he may be mistaken."

"Such a mistake amounts to insanity. It is true that I myself, awaking suddenly in the depth of night, have found myself convinced that the position of my bed had been reversed. But on opening my eyes the illusion ceased. I fear Mr. Hickey is mad. Your best course is this. Send down to Four Mile Water a perfectly sane investigator; an acute observer; one whose perceptive faculties, at once healthy and subtle, are absolutely unclouded by religious prejudice. In a word, send me. I will report to you the true state of affairs in a few days; and you can then make arrangements for transferring Hickey from the altar to the asylum."

"Yes, I had intended to send you. You are wonderfully sharp; and you would make a capital detective if you could only keep your mind to one point. But your chief qualification for this business is that you are too crazy to excite the suspicion of those whom you may have to watch. For the affair may be a trick. If so, I hope and believe that Hickey has no hand in it. Still, it is my duty to take every precaution."

"Cardinal, have traces of insanity ever appeared in our family?"

"Except in you and in my grandmother, no. She was a Pole; and you resemble her personally. Why do you ask?"

"Because it has often occurred to me that you are, perhaps, a little cracked. Excuse my candor; but a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of a red hat, who accuses everyone else beside himself of being mad, and who is disposed to listen seriously to a tale of a peripatetic graveyard, can hardly be quite sane. Depend upon it, Uncle, you want rest and change. The blood of your Polish grandmother is in your veins."

"I hope I may not be committing a sin in sending a ribald on the Church's affairs," he replied fervently. "However, we must use the instruments put into our hands. Is it agreed that you go?"

"Had you not delayed me with this story, which I might as well have learned on the spot, I should have been there already."

"There is no occasion for impatience, Zeno. I must first send to Hickey to find a place for you. I shall tell him that you are going to recover your health, as, in fact, you are. And, Zeno, in Heaven's name be discreet. Try to act like a man of sense. Do not dispute with Hickey on matters of religion. Since you are my nephew, you had better not disgrace me."

"I shall become an ardent Catholic, and do you infinite credit, Uncle."

"I wish you would, although you would hardly be an acquisition to the Church. And now I must turn you out. It is nearly three o'clock; and I need some sleep. Do you know your way back to your hotel?"

"I need not stir. I can sleep in this chair. Go to bed, and never mind me."

"I shall not close my eyes until you are safely out of the house. Come, rouse yourself, and say good night."

The following is a copy of my first report to the Cardinal:

"FOUR MILE WATER,
COUNTY WICKLOW,

"10th August.

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"The miracle is genuine. I have affected perfect credulity in order to throw the Hickeys and the countryfolk off their guard with me. I have listened to their method of convincing sceptical strangers. I have examined the ordnance maps, and cross-examined the neighbouring Protestant gentlefolk. I have spent a day upon the ground on each side of the water, and have visited it at midnight. I have considered the upheaval theories, subsidence theories, volcanic theories, and tidal wave theories which the provincial *savants* have suggested. They are all untenable.

"There is only one scoffer in the district, an Orangeman; and he admits the removal of the cemetery, but says it was dug up and trans-

planted in the night by a body of men under the command of Father Tom. This also is out of the question. The interment of Brimstone Billy was the first which had taken place for four years; and his is the only grave which bears a trace of recent digging. It is alone on the north bank; and the inhabitants shun it after nightfall. As each passer-by during the day throws a stone upon it, it will soon be marked by a large cairn. The graveyard, with a ruined stone chapel still in its midst, is on the south side.

"You may send down a committee to investigate the matter as soon as you please. There can be no doubt as to the miracle having actually taken place, as recorded by Hickey. As for me, I have grown so accustomed to it that if the county Wicklow were to waltz off with me to Middlesex, I should be quite impatient of any expressions of surprise from my friends in London.

"Is not the above a businesslike statement? Away, then, with this stale miracle. If you would see for yourself a miracle which can never pall, a vision of youth and health to be crowned with garlands forever, come down and see Kate Hickey, whom you suppose to be a little girl. Illusion, my lord cardinal, illusion!

"She is seventeen, with a bloom and a brogue that would lay your asceticism in ashes at a flash. To her I am an object of wonder, a strange man bred in wicked cities. She is courted by six feet of farming ma-

terial, chopped off a spare length of coarse humanity by the Almighty, and flung into Wicklow to plough the fields. His name is Phil Langan; and he hates me. I have to consort with him for the sake of Father Tom, whom I entertain vastly by stories of your wild oats sown at Salamanca.

"I exhausted all my authentic anecdotes the first day; and now I invent gallant escapades with Spanish donnas, in which you figure as a youth of unstable morals. This delights Father Tom infinitely. I feel that I have done you a service by thus casting on the cold sacerdotal abstraction which formerly represented you in Kate's imagination a ray of vivifying passion.

"What a country this is! A Hesperidean garden: such skies! Adieu, Uncle.

ZENO LEGGE."

Behold me, then, at Four Mile Water, in love. I had been in love frequently; but not oftener than once a year had I encountered a woman who affected me as seriously as Kate Hickey.

She was so shrewd, and yet so flippant! When I spoke of art she yawned. When I deplored the sordidness of the world she laughed, and called me "poor fellow!" When I told her what a treasure of beauty and freshness she had, she ridiculed me. When I reproached her with her brutality she became angry, and sneered at me for being what she called a fine gentleman.

One sunny afternoon we were standing at the gate of her uncle's house, she looking down the dusty road for the detestable Langan, I watching the spotless azure sky, when she said: "How soon are you going back to London?"

"I am not going back to London, Miss Hickey. I am not yet tired of Four Mile Water."

"I'm sure Four Mile Water ought to be proud of your approbation."

"You disapprove of my liking it, then? Or is it that you grudge me the happiness I have found there? I think Irish ladies grudge a man a moment's peace."

"I wonder you have ever prevailed on yourself to associate with Irish ladies, since they are so far beneath you."

"Did I say they were beneath me, Miss Hickey? I feel that I have made a deep impression on you."

"Indeed! Yes, you're quite right. I assure you I can't sleep at night for thinking of you, Mr. Legge. It's the best a Christian can do, seein' you think so mighty little of yourself."

"You are triply wrong, Miss Hickey—wrong to be sarcastic with me, wrong to pretend that there is anything unreasonable in my belief that you think of me sometimes, and wrong to discourage the candor with which I always avow that I think constantly of myself."

"Then you had better not speak to me, since I have no manners."

"Again! Did I say you had no manners? The warmest expressions

of regard from my mouth seem to reach your ears transformed into insults. Were I to repeat the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, you would retort as though I had been reproaching you. This is because you hate me. You never misunderstand Langan, whom you love."

"I don't know what London manners are, Mr. Legge; but in Ireland gentlemen are expected to mind their own business. How dare you say I love Mr. Langan?"

"Then you do not love him?"

"It is nothing to you whether I love him or not."

"Nothing to me that you hate me and love another?"

"I didn't say I hated you. You're not so very clever yourself at understandin' what people say, though you make such a fuss because they don't understand you." Here, as she glanced down the road again, she suddenly looked glad.

"Aha!" I said.

"What do you mean by 'Aha'?"

"No matter. I will now show you what a man's sympathy is. As you perceived just then, Langan—who is too tall for his age, by the bye—is coming to pay you a visit. Well, instead of staying with you, as a jealous woman would, I will withdraw."

"I don't care whether you go or stay, I'm sure. I wonder what you would give to be as fine a man as Mr. Langan."

"All I possess, I swear it! But solely because you admire tall men

more than broad views. Mr. Langan may be defined geometrically as length without breadth, altitude without position, a line on the landscape, not a point in it."

"How very clever you are!"

"You do not understand me, I see. Here comes your lover, stepping over the wall like a camel. And here go I, out through the gate like a Christian. Good afternoon, Mr. Langan. I am going because Miss Hickey has something to say to you about me which she would rather not say in my presence. You will excuse me?"

"Oh, I'll excuse you," he said boorishly. I smiled, and went out.

Before I was quite out of hearing, Kate whispered vehemently to him, "I hate that fellow."

I smiled again; but I had scarcely done so when my spirits fell. I walked hastily away with a coarse threatening sound in my ears like that of the clarionets whose sustained low notes darken the woodland in "Der Freischütz."

I found myself presently at the graveyard. It was a barren place, enclosed by a mud wall with a gate to admit funerals, and numerous gaps to admit the peasantry, who made short cuts across it as they went to and fro between Four Mile Water and the market town. The graves were mounds overgrown with grass: there was no keeper; nor flowers, railings, or any of the conventionalities that make an English graveyard repulsive.

A great thornbush, near what was called the grave of the holy sisters, was covered with scraps of cloth and flannel, attached by peasant women who had prayed before it. There were three kneeling there as I entered; for the reputation of the place had been revived of late by the miracle; and a ferry had been established close by, to conduct visitors over the route taken by the graveyard.

From where I stood I could see on the opposite bank the heap of stones, perceptibly increased since my last visit, marking the deserted grave of Brimstone Billy. I strained my eyes broodingly at it for some minutes, and then descended the river bank and entered the boat.

"Good evenin' t'your honour," said the ferryman, and set to work to draw the boat hand over hand by a rope stretched across the water.

"Good evening. Is your business beginning to fall off yet?"

"Faith, it never was as good as it mightabeen. The people that comes from the south side can see Billy's grave—Lord have mercy on him!—across the wather; and they think bad of payin' a penny to put a stone over him. It's them that lives towrst Dublin that makes the journey. Your honour is the third I've brought from south to north this blessed day."

"When do most people come? In the afternoon, I suppose?"

"All hours, sur, except afther dusk. There isn't a sowl in the

country ud come within sight of that grave, wanst the sun goes down."

"And you? Do you stay here all night by yourself?"

"The holy heavens forbid! Is it me stay here all night? No, your honour: I tether the boat at siven o'hlcock, and lave Brimstone Billy—God forgimme!—to take care of it till mornin'."

"It will be stolen some night, I'm afraid."

"Arra, who'd dar come next or near it, let alone stale it? Faith, I'd think twice before lookin' at it meself in the dark. God bless your honour, and gran'che long life."

I had given sixpence. I went to the reprobate's grave and stood at the foot of it, looking at the sky, gorgeous with the descent of the sun. To my English eyes, accustomed to giant trees, broad lawns, and stately mansions, the landscape was wild and inhospitable.

The ferryman was already tugging at the rope on his way back (I had told him I did not intend to return that way), and presently I saw him make the painter fast to the south bank, put on his coat, and trudge homeward.

I turned towards the grave at my feet. Those who had interred Brimstone Billy, working hastily at an unlawful hour, and in fear of molestation by the people, had hardly dug a grave. They had scooped out earth enough to hide their burden, and no more. A stray goat had

kicked away a corner of the mound and exposed the coffin.

It occurred to me, as I took some of the stones from the cairn, and heaped them so as to repair the breach, that had the miracle been the work of a body of men, they would have moved the one grave instead of the many. Even from a supernatural point of view, it seemed strange that the sinner should have banished the elect, when, by their superior numbers, they might so much more easily have banished him.

It was almost dark when I left the spot. After a walk of half a mile I recrossed the water by a bridge, and returned to the farmhouse in which I lodged. Here, finding that I had had enough of solitude, I only stayed to make a cup of tea. Then I went to Father Hickey's cottage.

Kate was alone when I entered. She looked up quickly as I opened the door, and turned away disappointed when she recognized me.

"Be generous for once," I said. "I have walked about aimlessly for hours in order to avoid spoiling the beautiful afternoon for you by my presence. When the sun was up, I withdrew my shadow from your path. Now that darkness has fallen, shed some light on mine. May I stay half an hour?"

"You may stay as long as you like, of course. My uncle will soon be home. He is clever enough to talk to you."

"What, more sarcasms! Come,

Miss Hickey, help me to spend a pleasant evening. It will only cost you a smile. I am somewhat cast down. Four Mile Water is a paradise; but without you, it would be a little lonely."

"It must be very lonely for you. I wonder why you came here."

"Because I heard that the women here were all Zerlinas, like you, and the men Masettos, like Mr. Phil—where are you going to?"

"Let me pass, Mr. Legge. I had intended never speaking to you again after the way you went on about Mr. Langan to-day; and I wouldn't either, only my uncle made me promise not to take any notice of you, because you were—no matter; but I won't listen to you any more on the subject."

"Do not go. I swear never to mention his name again. I beg your pardon for what I said—you shall have no further cause for complaint. Will you forgive me?"

She sat down, evidently disappointed by my submission. I took a chair, and placed myself near her. She tapped the floor impatiently with her foot. I saw that there was not a movement I could make, not a look, not a tone of my voice, which did not irritate her.

"You were remarking," I said, "that your uncle desired you to take no notice of me because—"

She closed her lips, and did not answer.

"I fear I have offended you again by my curiosity. But indeed, I had

no idea that he had forbidden you to tell me the reason."

"He did not forbid me. Since you are so determined to find out—"

"No, excuse me. I do not wish to know. I am sorry I asked."

"Indeed! Perhaps you would be sorrier still to be told. I only made a secret of it out of consideration for you."

"Then your uncle has spoken ill of me behind my back. If that be so, there is no such thing as a true man in Ireland. I would not have believed it on the word of any woman alive save yourself."

"I never said my uncle was a back-biter. Just to show you what he thinks of you, I will tell you, whether you want to know it or not—that he bid me not mind you because you were only a poor mad creature, sent down here by your family to be out of harm's way."

"Oh, Miss Hickey!"

"There now! You have got it out of me and I wish I had bit my tongue out first. I sometimes think—that I mayn't sin!—that you have a bad angel in you."

"I am glad you told me this," I said gently. "Do not reproach yourself for having done so, I beg. Your uncle has been misled by what he has heard of my family, who are all more or less insane. Far from being mad, I am actually the only rational man named Legge in the three kingdoms. I will prove this to you, and at the same time keep your indiscretion in countenance, by

telling you something I ought not to tell you. It is this. I am not here as an invalid or a chance tourist. I am here to investigate the miracle. The Cardinal, a shrewd if somewhat erratic man, selected mine from all the long heads at his disposal to come down here and find out the truth of Father Hickey's story. Would he have entrusted such a task to a madman, think you?"

"The truth of—who dared to doubt my uncle's word? And so you are a spy, a dirty informer."

I started. The adjective she had used, though probably the commonest expression of contempt in Ireland, is revolting to an Englishman.

"Miss Hickey," I said, "there is in me, as you have said, a bad angel. Do not shock my good angel—who is a person of taste—quite away from my heart, lest the other be left undisputed monarch of it. Hear! The chapel bell is ringing the angelus. Can you, with that sound softening the darkness of the village night, cherish a feeling of spite against one who admires you?"

"You come between me and my prayers," she said hysterically, and began to sob. She had scarcely done so, when I heard voices without. Then Langan and the priest entered.

"Oh, Phil," she cried, running to him, "take me away from him. I can't bear—"

I turned towards him, and showed him my dog-tooth in a false smile.

He felled me at one stroke, as he might have felled a poplar tree.

"Murdher!" exclaimed the priest. "What are you doin', Phil?"

"He's an informer," sobbed Kate. "He came down here to spy on you, Uncle, and to try and show that the blessed miracle was a make-up. I knew it long before he told me, by his insulting ways. He wanted to make love to me."

I rose with difficulty from beneath the table, where I had lain motionless for a moment.

"Sir," I said, "I am somewhat dazed by the recent action of Mr. Langan, whom I beg, the next time he converts himself into a fulling-mill, to do so at the expense of a man more nearly his equal in strength than I. What your niece has told you is partly true. I am indeed the Cardinal's spy; and I have already reported to him that the miracle is a genuine one. A committee of gentlemen will wait on you to-morrow to verify it, at my suggestion. I have thought that the proof might be regarded by them as more-complete if you were taken by surprise.

"Miss Hickey: that I admire all that is admirable in you is but to say that I have a sense of the beautiful. To say that I love you would be mere profanity.

"Mr. Langan: I have in my pocket a loaded pistol, which I carry from a silly English prejudice against your countrymen. Had I been the Hercules of the ploughtail,

and you in my place, I should have been a dead man now. Do not redder: you are safe as far as I am concerned."

"Let me tell you before you leave my house for good," said Father Hickey, who seemed to have become unreasonably angry, "that you should never have crossed my threshold if I had known you were a spy—no, not if your uncle were his Holiness the Pope himself."

Here a frightful thing happened to me. I felt giddy, and put my hand to my head. Three warm drops trickled over it. Instantly I became murderous. My mouth filled with blood, my eyes were blinded with it; I seemed to drown in it. My hand went involuntarily to the pistol. It is my habit to obey my impulses instantaneously.

Fortunately the impulse to kill vanished before a sudden perception of how I might miraculously humble the mad vanity in which these foolish people had turned upon me. The blood receded from my ears; I again heard and saw distinctly.

"And let *me* tell you," Langan was saying, "that if you think yourself handier with cold lead than you are with your fists, I'll exchange shots with you, and welcome, whenever you please. Father Tom's credit is the same to me as my own; and if you say a word against it, you lie."

"His credit is in my hands," I said. "I am the Cardinal's witness. Do you defy me?"

"There is the door," said the priest, holding it open before me. "Until you can undo the visible work of God's hand your testimony can do no harm to me."

"Father Hickey," I replied, "before the sun rises again upon Four Mile Water, I will undo the visible work of God's hand, and bring the pointing finger of the scoffer upon your altar."

I bowed to Kate, and walked out.

It was so dark that I could not at first see the garden gate. Before I found it, I heard through the window Father Hickey's voice, saying, "I wouldn't for ten pound that this had happened, Phil. He's as mad as a March hare. The Cardinal told me so."

I returned to my lodging, and took a cold bath to cleanse the blood from my neck and shoulder. The effect of the blow I had received was so severe that even after the bath and a light meal I felt giddy and languid.

There was an alarm clock on the mantelpiece. I wound it, set the alarum for half-past twelve, muffled it so that it should not disturb the people in the adjoining room, and went to bed, where I slept soundly for an hour and a quarter.

Then the alarm roused me, and I sprang up before I was thoroughly awake. Had I hesitated, the desire to relapse into perfect sleep would have overpowered me. Although the muscles of my neck were painfully stiff, and my hands unsteady from

my nervous disturbance, produced by the interruption of my first slumber, I dressed myself resolutely, and, after taking a draught of cold water, stole out of the house.

It was exceedingly dark; and I had some difficulty in finding the cow-house, whence I borrowed a spade, and a truck with wheels, ordinarily used for moving sacks of potatoes. These I carried in my hands until I was beyond earshot of the house, when I put the spade on the truck, and wheeled it along the road to the cemetery.

When I approached the water, knowing that no one would dare to come thereabout at such an hour, I made greater haste, no longer concerning myself about the rattling of the wheels. Looking across to the opposite bank, I could see a phosphorescent glow, marking the lonely grave of Brimstone Billy. This helped me to find the ferry station, where, after wandering a little and stumbling often, I found the boat, and embarked with my implements.

Guided by the rope, I crossed the water without difficulty, landed, made fast the boat, dragged the truck up the bank, and sat down to rest on the cairn at the grave. For nearly a quarter of an hour I sat watching the patches of jack-o'-lantern fire and collecting my strength for the work before me. Then the distant bell of the chapel clock tolled one.

I rose, took the spade, and in about ten minutes uncovered the

coffin, which smelled horribly. Keeping to windward of it, and using the spade as a lever, I contrived with great labor to place it on the truck. I wheeled it without accident to the landing-place, where, by placing the shafts of the truck upon the stern of the boat and lifting the foot by main strength, I succeeded in embarking my load after twenty minutes' toil, during which I got covered with clay and perspiration, and several times all but upset the boat.

At the southern bank I had less difficulty in getting truck and coffin ashore, and dragging them up to the graveyard.

It was now past two o'clock, and the dawn had begun; so that I had no further trouble from want of light. I wheeled the coffin to a patch of loamy soil which I had noticed in the afternoon near the grave of the holy sisters. I had warmed to my work; my neck no longer pained me; and I began to dig vigorously, soon making a shallow trench, deep enough to hide the coffin with the addition of a mound.

The chill pearl-coloured morning had by this time quite dissipated the darkness. I could see, and was myself visible, for miles around. This alarmed me, and made me impatient to finish my task. Nevertheless, I was forced to rest for a moment before placing the coffin in the trench.

I wiped my brow and wrists, and again looked about me. The tomb

of the holy women, a massive slab supported on four stone spheres, was grey and wet with dew. Near it was the thornbush covered with rags, the newest of which were growing gaudy in the radiance which was stretching up from the coast on the east.

It was time to finish my work. I seized the truck, laid it alongside the grave, and gradually prized the coffin off with the spade until the coffin rolled over into the trench with a hollow sound like a drunken remonstrance from the sleeper within. I shovelled the earth round and over it, working as fast as possible. In less than a quarter of an hour it was buried. Ten minutes more sufficed to make the mound symmetrical, and to clear the traces of my work from the adjacent sward. Then I flung down the spade, threw up my arms, and vented a sigh of relief and triumph.

But I recoiled as I saw that I was standing on a barren common, covered with furze. No product of man's handiwork was near me except my truck and spade and the grave of Brimstone Billy, again as lonely as before.

I turned towards the water. On the opposite bank was the cemetery, back on the north side, with the tomb of the holy women, the thornbush with its rags stirring in the morning breeze, and the broken mud wall. The ruined chapel was there too, not a stone shaken from

its crumbling walls, not a sign to show that it and its precinct were less rooted in their place than the eternal hills around.

I looked down at the grave with a pang of compassion for the unfortunate Wolfe Tone Fitzgerald, with whom the blessed would not rest. I was even astonished, though I had worked expressly to this end. But the birds were astir, and the cocks crowing. My landlord was an early riser.

I put the spade on the truck again, and hastened back to the farm, where I replaced them in the cow-house. Then I stole into the house, and took a clean pair of boots, an overcoat, and a silk hat. These, with a change of linen, were sufficient to make my appearance respectable.

I went out again, bathed in the Four Mile Water, took a last look at the cemetery, now back once more on the north side, and walked to Wicklow, whence I travelled by the first train to Dublin.

Some months later, at Cairo, I

received a packet of Irish newspapers and a leading article, cut from *The Times*, on the subject of the miracle.

Father Hickey had suffered the meed of his inhospitable conduct. The committee, arriving at Four Mile Water the day after I left, had found the graveyard exactly where it had formerly stood. Father Hickey, taken by surprise, had attempted to defend himself by a confused statement, which led the committee to declare finally that the miracle was a gross imposture.

The Times, commenting on this after adducing a number of examples of priestly craft, remarked, "We are glad to learn that the Rev. Mr. Hickey has been permanently relieved of his duties as the parish priest of Four Mile Water by his ecclesiastical superior. It is less gratifying to have to record that it has been found possible to obtain two hundred signatures to a memorial embodying the absurd defense offered to the committee, and expressing unabated confidence in the integrity of Mr. Hickey."



Ellery Queen

No Parking

One of the series of cases in which Ellery grapples with contemporary problems—such as the lack of schoolrooms, the lack of living quarters, and in this story, the lack of parking space on the streets of New York City . . .

MODESTA RYAN PLAYED HER greatest role not on a Broadway stage but in her penthouse on Madison Avenue. The performance took place one midsummer night against a backdrop of flooding rain, thunder, and lightning; power failures darkened some buildings in the Central Park area; and, of course, the Athenia Apartments was one of them. So Modesta even got to play her big scene by the light of candles, a surefire touch.

Ellery was not surprised. Modesta Ryan specialized in melodrama. Everything she touched went off like a rocket. She could not walk her dog without landing on the front page. Her last pet had broken his leash on Fifth Avenue and been run over by a car carrying the ambassador of an Iron Curtain country.

Modesta was spectacularly unlucky in love. She had never married. The men she wanted always seemed to prefer lisping ingénues or hat-check girls, and those who wanted her she could not stand.

Her suitors ran to hand-kissers, cigarette-holder smokers, jodhpur-wearers, and gloomy college boys with mother fixations.

But suddenly, there he was. It was too impossibly wonderful. There he was—all three of him.

For naturally, when the right man did come along, two others equally right showed up, too.

It was a typical Modesta Ryan sensation, and for some months Broadway speculated on little else. Which of the three would she marry?

Jock Shanville was male lead in the new play Modesta was rehearsing, a costume piece set in medieval Venice. It was type casting, for besides flaunting a doge's profile, a wicked eye, and a fine leg in tights, Shanville excelled in scene stealing, reputation poisoning, character assassination, and other closet-arts of the theater. Jock had a wife, an ex-show girl named Pearline, but she was no problem; his rapier tongue had been backing her toward the near-

est divorce court long before he decided on Modesta Ryan as her successor.

Then there was Kid Catt, a black-browed fighting machine who dealt bloody unconsciousness from both fists with a cold smile that had become his TV trademark. The Kid's body was his god, self-denial his creed; and women sat high on his proscribed list. So when he fell in love with Modesta it was with the violent passion of a fallen monk. Modesta found holding the beautiful young brute at bay an enchanting experience.

Richard Van Olde II, however, was a quite different temptation. Van Olde was a soft-spoken tyrant of position and wealth. Modesta Ryan was the first woman he had wanted since the death of his wife a dozen years before, and he meant to have her. He was a man of instant, irrevocable decisions, and he offered Modesta marriage from the first, courting her tirelessly. There was something about his lashless eyes and noiseless personality that made her shiver like an inexperienced girl.

Jock Shanville fitted her like a glove, young Catt excited her, Van Olde fascinated her.

Which should she accept?

The phone rang just as Ellery was stooping to unlace his shoes.

"It's for you," Inspector Queen called from the other bedroom.

"At a quarter to twelve?" El-

lery used the extension. "Yes?" "Ellery? Modesta Ryan . . ."

"Modesta." Ellery fingered his tie automatically. He had known her for years, and each time he heard her voice was like the first time. Tonight the throaty tones had a throb in them, subdued and off-beat. "What's wrong?"

"Ellery, I'm in trouble," she whispered. "Can you come right over to my apartment? Please."

"Of course. But what kind of trouble?"

"I can't talk. I'm not alone—"

"This marriage business?"

"Yes, I decided today. Gave the other two their walking papers. But hurry!"

"Modesta, wait. Just tell me who's with you—"

But the phone went dead. Ellery grabbed his raincoat and ran.

The streets were empty rivers, and he roared east toward Central Park leaving a wake like a power launch. He was through the park transverse and across Fifth and Madison Avenues in a matter of minutes. Sixty seconds later he was sloshing around the corner of Park Avenue into a one-way westbound street in the East Eighties, peering through his streaming windshield for a parking space.

As far down the street as he could see, the curbs were jammed with cars bumper to bumper.

Ellery cruised, trying to control his temper. You could never find a parking space in New York,

least of all when you were in a hurry. And when it rained—

The Athenia Apartments was on the northeast corner, just off Madison Avenue. Between the corner and the Athenia's canopy he sighted empty curb and he stepped on the gas. But when he got there he saw a No Parking sign; it was a crosstown bus stop. Wouldn't you know! Back into Madison Avenue he drove, and he circumnavigated the block, ready to settle for a dozen feet of curb anywhere. But the curbs were all occupied. He turned into Modesta's street again, worried and furious.

God knows what's happening up there, he thought angrily. He was tempted to park at the bus stop; but a family respect for the law, and the prospect of squatting half a day in Traffic Court, dissuaded him.

No miracle had happened. There was still no place to park on Modesta's street. Groaning, Ellery turned up Madison Avenue again.

"This is my last time on this merry-go-round," he promised himself grittily. "Modesta must think I'm coming by pack mule. I'll double-park."

The last time around he had noticed one car illegally parked. At the curb between the Athenia's canopy and the entrance of the next building stood three cars in a row, and a fourth was double-parked by the side of the middle one. The double-parked car bore an MD license plate.

Again Ellery drove up the block from Park Avenue toward Madison. He was about to pull in behind the doctor's car when two young couples dashed out of the apartment house on the southeast corner, splashed toward the Athenia's canopy, and jumped into the first of the three parked cars.

"Hurray," Ellery said sourly; and when his rescuers pulled away he shot around the double-parked car and backed like a fireman into the vacated space nearest the canopy.

Five minutes past midnight! He had lost ten minutes finding a space. And he'd been lucky at that.

Ellery was under the Athenia's canopy in two jumps. He ran into the lobby, swishing the water off his hat. The lobby was dark. Basement flooded, probably, shorting the power mains.

"Doorman?" he shouted into the darkness.

"Comin'." A flashlight snapped on and bobbed quickly toward him. "Who'd you want to see, sir?"

"Miss Ryan, penthouse. Elevator out?"

"Uh-huh." The doorman seemed dubious. "It's pretty late. The house phone's not workin', either."

"I'm expected," said Ellery. "Where's the stairway? Speak up!"

The doorman stared, then mumbled, "This way."

The man shuffled toward the rear of the lobby past the dead switchboard, flashing his light be-

hind him for Ellery. As they reached the emergency door it opened and a male figure hurried past them and vanished in the darkness. Ellery caught one glimpse of the figure as it scuttled by—stooped over, so that his height and age were impossible to guess, wearing a double-breasted tan trench coat buttoned up the left side to the chin, and a tan Stetson pulled well down over his face.

Something about the man bothered Ellery, but he had no time to analyze.

He ran up marble stairs endlessly, praying that the battery of his pencil-flashlight would hold out. When he reached the penthouse landing eleven flights up he was seeing phosphorescent confetti in the darkness. Breathing hard, he swept his light about, located the pushbutton near the service door, and leaned on it. He heard a buzz inside the apartment, but nothing else.

He tried the door. It was unlocked.

Ellery stepped into Modesta Ryan's country-style kitchen. A candle-glass was wavering eerily on the fireplace mantel; a bed of briquets had burned to embers.

"Modesta?"

He stepped through the swinging door into her dining room, feeling his scalp tickle. A candlestick on the sideboard illuminated the room fitfully. The hall beyond was dark.

"Modesta?"

He groped along the passage, playing his flash, no longer calling. He kept telling himself as the shadows parted in his path that Modesta was quite capable of an elaborate joke, picking a night like this for atmosphere.

For a moment, as he stepped into her living room, he was sure of it. Two seven-branched candelabra blazed, and in the focus of their flames, in an exquisite negligee, lay Modesta's lovely body. She was crumpled on the Italian tile floor beside her mother-of-pearl grand piano. On the breast of her negligee there was an illusion of a bullet wound and blood . . . Ellery knelt. The stuff staining her breast looked exactly like ketchup.

But it was not. And the silk was scorched around a very real hole.

He hunted for her, pulse. There it was!—but it was flickering like the candles. She was barely alive.

Ellery ran to the phone more out of habit than conviction. To his surprise it was working. He made two calls—one for an emergency ambulance, the other to his father; and then he tore through the apartment to the service door and began leaping down the eleven flights like a mountain goat.

If she dies, he was thinking, those parked cars around here ought to be tagged as accessories. The ten minutes he had lost looking for a parking space might have saved

what was left of Modesta Ryan's life.

He plunged out under the canopy, followed by the astonished doorman. Nothing had changed. The cloudburst continued to swab down the streets. The same three cars were lined up between the Athenia's entrance and the adjoining building, his own foremost; the same doctor's car was still double-parked beside the middle car of the three, boxing it in.

Of course the man in the trench coat was gone.

"Then this is the way it went, Wladczki?" Inspector Queen said to the doorman in the light of the police torches. "You were on duty since four p.m., due to go off at midnight, but you stayed on because the storm held up your relief man. You didn't leave this lobby at any time. Nobody could have sneaked past you. All right.

"Miss Ryan came home from rehearsal in a taxi about seven p.m. She was alone. About eight her maid left for the night. Between eight and a few minutes past eleven only five people entered or left the building. They are all long-time tenants. At eleven thirty Mr. Trench Coat walks into the lobby. Five minutes later an M.D. on emergency call to an old lady tenant—who's very sick in 4-G—drives up and complains to you he can't find space for his car. You let the doctor double-park—".

"And he's still up in 4-G," said

Sergeant Velie. "The other five, the tenants, alibi okay, too."

"Now about Mr. Trench Coat. He didn't come by cab, you say. You don't get a real good look at him by your flash, the way he has his hat pulled down and his collar turned up. He talks in a croaky whisper, as if he has a bad cold. He says he has an appointment with Miss Modesta Ryan, you tell him he'll have to walk up to the penthouse, he goes up the stairway, and that's the last you see of him till a few minutes past midnight when he ducks out the stairway door under your nose—and the nose," added the Inspector gently, "of the eminent Mr. Queen here."

Ellery gave his father a wan look. "Did you notice," he asked the doorman, "how wet his trench coat and hat were when he first came into the lobby?"

"No wetter than yours was, Mr. Queen," said the doorman. "Got my name spelled right, Sergeant?"

"Time will tell," said the Sergeant. "Hey, Goldie. Well?"

Detective Goldberg came in, shaking himself like a dog. He had found Modesta Ryan's maid asleep in her Harlem flat, he reported; the maid knew nothing except that on Miss Ryan's arrival home she had made three phone calls—one to Kid Catt, one to Mr. Shanville, and the last to Mr. Van Olde. But the maid hadn't listened to the conversations, so she couldn't

say which ones Miss Ryan had given the heave and which one she'd made the happy man.

"Any report from the hospital yet?" muttered the Inspector.

"She's this way that way," said Sergeant Velie.

"But did she talk?"

"She's got all she can do to keep on breathing, Inspector. She's still unconscious."

"Then we do it the hard way," said the old man gloomily. "It's a cinch Trench Coat was one of Modesta's two rejects. He didn't waste any time, did he? As soon as those three are brought in, have 'em taken up to the penthouse. Coming, Ellery?"

His son sighed. "If I could have found a place to park as soon as I got here"

Hollow laughter followed him to the stairway door.

At twenty minutes after two the Inspector finished with the last of the three interrogations. He found Ellery in Modesta Ryan's living room staring reproachfully at her phone.

"Any luck?"

"I've called every columnist in town, all her close friends. She just didn't tell anybody."

The old man grunted. He stuck his head into the hall. "Get those cuties in here."

Shanville made his entrance with a rather set smile. The disheveled blond hair was all dagger points,

and with the slight upcurve of his lips he looked Satanic.

"What now?" he asked. "The rack?"

About Kid Catt there was a look of astounded suffering, as if he had just been knocked down. His powerful frame sagged into a chair and his black eyes stared dully at the chalkmarks on the tiles near the piano.

"Who did it?" the fighter mumbled. "Just tell me which one of these two did it."

"Underplay, Kid," said the actor pleasantly. "This is a professional audience."

The black eyes looked at him. "Lay off, actor," the Kid said.

"Or else?" smiled Shanville.

"I'm leaving," said Richard Van Olde II abruptly.

The tycoon was very angry. His naturally pale skin was almost green, the lashless eyes murderous.

"Just another few minutes Mr. Van Olde," said Inspector Queen.

"A very few, please. Then I either walk out of here unmolested or I telephone my attorneys and the Commissioner."

"Yes, sir. Now, gentlemen, each of you wanted to marry Miss Ryan —bad. And each of you got a phone call from her tonight. One she told she'd finally decided to marry. Two—the other two—she brushed. One of those two promptly came here tonight and shot her."

"You think you've got us stymied," the Inspector went on,

showing his dentures. "Each man was found home in bed. And while we have the bullet—probably from a .38—search of your respective premises has failed to turn up the gun. Or the trench coat or Stetson. On top of that, each claims *he* was the man Modesta told over the phone she was accepting! Two of those claims are lies, of course, to take the heat off.

"Gentlemen, I have news for you," said Inspector Queen softly. "Thrown-away guns, coats, and hats have a way of turning up. And you've got no alibis for the time of the shooting. You were home in bed, say all of you, but none of you can prove it, not even you, Shanville, because you occupy a separate bedroom and weren't even heard coming home—"

"Dad."

The Inspector looked around, surprised. Ellery was on his feet, the picture of wry hopelessness.

"I don't see any point to going any further with this now, do you? Let's call it a night. These gentlemen won't run away, and we can all use some sleep."

The old man blinked.

"All right," he said.

But when the three had gone, he growled to his son, "And what's the big plot, Master Mind?"

"It's simple enough," Ellery said as they crouched near the glass outer doors of the lobby. It was after three, the rain had stopped,

and the chrome on the dark cars outside winked damply in the street lights. "We're waiting for our friend to come back."

"Come *back*?" said Sergeant Velie. "What is he, goofed?"

"Case of necessity, Velie," murmured Ellery. "Consider. How did Trench Coat get to the Athenia—?"

"Get here?"

"Yes. By cab? No, says the doorman. On foot? No, because if he'd walked or even run from as close by as the corner of Madison he'd have been soaked in that downpour, whereas the doorman said his trench coat and hat were no wetter than mine when I got here—and I had to make only two jumps from my car to get under the canopy. Conclusion? *Trench Coat came in a car, and he parked almost as close to the canopy as I did.*"

His father made a strangled sort of sound.

"Now, the nearest parked cars are those four between the Athenia's canopy and the next building—my car, the two behind mine, and the M.D.'s, double-parked beside the one behind mine. Well, which of the four was Trench Coat's? Not mine, of course, or the car mine replaced—the people who drove off in that one came from the building across the street; what's more, they drove away before Trench Coat left the Athenia.

"So Trench Coat's car must be one of the other three. Which one?"

"Let's see. Trench Coat made his escape just as I was going up to Modesta's apartment. You'd expect him to jump into his car—one of those three—and drive off. Did he? No—when I rushed downstairs after finding Modesta shot, all three cars were still parked. Why didn't he take his car for his getaway? *Obviously, because he couldn't.* His car must be the one behind mine, the middle one of the three at the curb—the one that's boxed in by the doctor's car!"

The Inspector sounded punchy. "So that's why you moved your jalopy away . . . to give him room to get his car out when he thinks the coast is clear."

"That's the idea," said Ellery.

"Now all you have to do," said the Sergeant, not without bitterness, "is tell us who you see in your crystal ball."

"Why, So-and-So," replied Ellery, naming a name; and at their exclamations he grinned. "At least, I'm ninety-nine per cent sure."

At four fifteen a.m. a furtive figure skulked suddenly past the Athenia, darted into the designated car, and fought cattishly but in vain to shake off Sergeant Velie's paralyzing clutch.

It was, as Ellery had predicted, So-and-So.

By the time they booked their catch downtown and sat in on the confession, the city was driving to work. They crawled uptown in

Ellery's car to the hospital.

It was while Inspector Queen went off to inquire about Modesta that Sergeant Velie seemed to come out of a fog. "Can I be *that* stupid, Ellery? I still don't see how—"

"Console yourself," soothed Ellery. "The doorman and I saw Trench Coat; you didn't. When he hurried past us at the stairway door, I was bothered by something in his appearance. Later I realized what it had been: he'd had his double-breasted coat buttoned down the *left* side. It's women who are left-side buttoners; men are the reverse. So I knew Trench Coat was a woman dressed as a man. Which woman? Van Olde's a widower, Kid Catt's a bachelor, and neither has any entangling alliances. But Jock Shanville's married, so his wife was an odds-on bet. As she told us, she eavesdropped on Modesta's call, heard that she was through as Mrs. Shanville, and proceeded—with the help of her theatrical training—to do something about it."

The Sergeant was still shaking his head when the Inspector came back, all smiles. Modesta would live—although she'd have to have new evening gowns designed—and she had satisfactorily fingered Pearline Shanville as the jealous witch who had ruined her *decolletage*.

Then they shuffled blearily out to Ellery's car and he found a ticket on it for parking in a restricted hospital zone.

Michael Arlen

The Great Emerald Mystery

In which Michael Arlen squinted through his monocle at England's upper crust in a comedy of manners, British style, and written in what might be called London Runyonese—or, as the editor who first published this story wrote: in which “the master milliner of THE GREEN HAT turns his talent for society satire to a great green gem—and proves himself a master lapidarist” . . . again, cheers!

IT CANNOT BE TOO CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD that I do not know these people. Society has nothing to offer a serious man—that is my position. No one will deny, of course, that such a life has its uses. I am speaking of the life called high. No one will deny that it gives employment to a large number of people. Moreover, horses like it. On the other hand, it has aspects which must necessarily be offensive to a serious man. It is the intention to deal with those aspects truthfully and fearlessly.

You will be asking how I come to know such people. I do not. As a student of human nature, however, it is my duty to keep in touch with every corner of the community. Thus I hear of such people as Mrs. Angel and the fellow Dwight-Rankin from my cousin Pullman, who has degraded the exercise of a naturally feeble intelligence to the service of a man about town.

Mrs. Angel appears to have added to the advantages of being born the daughter of an admiral by having

married a colonel. My cousin Pullman tells me that they are both dead. One can only regret, therefore, that one is too late to tender sympathy to the gallant men. Such women as Mrs. Angel are scarcely a credit to the Services; while as for that fellow Dwight-Rankin, one can only view with deep alarm the state of a country in which such men are permitted to die a natural death.

No one will deny that society should be a gathering of elegant people for the purposes of being elegant. One thinks of people in society as charming triflers. One imagines them as spending their days in bandying about airy nothings. One pictures them as nonchalantly engaged in the high-class diversions of golf, tennis, and polo. One visualizes them as having a series of baths day and night with that fearless disregard for the after-effects of continual immersion in water which characterizes the inheritors of Vikings and Norsemen. One reads of

them as going out in the evenings to dine off the more expensive fishes, the more picturesque birds, and the palest vegetables. One does *not* think of them as preying on their fellows.

My cousin Pullman says that the present industrial conditions are to blame for that. He says that a beautiful widow like Mrs. Angel, finding herself in straitened circumstances, will avenge herself on the world at large. He says that she is quite right to get what she can out of life. You can see that my cousin Pullman is already tainted by the flippant materialism of the people with whom he passes his time. The influence of that fellow Dwight-Rankin is not only ruining his life, but undoubtedly shortening it. My cousin Pullman says that Dwight-Rankin breakfasts off two green olives and a biscuit soaked in rum.

Apparently it was Dwight-Rankin who introduced him to the beautiful widow Mrs. Angel. One imagines Mrs. Angel, from her frequent photographs in the modish journals, as living in surroundings of inconceivable luxury and polish. Actually, my cousin Pullman says, she lives in a garage not far from Buckingham Palace, but not very near either. The garage has been converted into a pretty-enough little flat, and there the fellow Dwight-Rankin and my cousin Pullman will sit with Mrs. Angel of an evening before dinner, and she will give them to drink, and they,

my cousin Pullman says, will drink.

One evening Mrs. Angel greeted them with an abstracted air. Responding at last, however, to Dwight-Rankin's raillery, she admitted that she was thoughtful because, acting under the grave provocation of repeated invitations; she had at last promised to dine with Mr. Buggenshaw.

My cousin Pullman says he was thunderstruck. He did not know Mr. Buggenshaw personally—but who, he asks, has not heard of him? Indeed, Mrs. Angel's immediate future filled my cousin Pullman with profound depression. He saw her on the downward path, dragged down into the depths by money-lenders. He saw her ruined and desperate. That fellow Dwight-Rankin appears, on the other hand, to have viewed the possibilities with considerably less alarm. He merely suggested, with that offensive air of rectitude which has done so much to bring public-school men into discredit in the more virile colonies, that it was highly improper for Mrs. Angel to dine alone with Mr. Buggenshaw.

One can instantly see the fellow Dwight-Rankin's true character in the suggestion. He wanted a free meal.

My cousin Pullman, on the other hand, was actuated by the highest motives of chivalry in endorsing the fellow's suggestion. He says he drew a vivid picture of what might happen to Mrs. Angel if she dined alone

with Mr. Buggenshaw. Mrs. Angel was undoubtedly affected by this. My cousin Pullman drove home his advantage by reminding her with what consternation her late father, the gallant Admiral, and her late husband, the gallant Colonel, would view from on high the spectacle of their beloved dining alone with Mr. Buggenshaw.

"In fact," the gross Dwight-Rankin concluded, "there is only one way to put the matter right. Pullman and I will also dine with Mr. Buggenshaw."

My cousin Pullman says that Mrs. Angel's acceptance of the suggestion was cast in a thoughtful mold owing, as she pointed out, to the difficulty of introducing at the last moment two strange young men into Mr. Buggenshaw's house for no other apparent purpose than to drink Mr. Buggenshaw's wines and to eat Mr. Buggenshaw's dinner. One can see the fellow Dwight-Rankin expanding at the mere mention of food and drink. At his suggestion it was finally decided that Mrs. Angel's maid should ring up Mr. Buggenshaw's house to say that Mrs. Angel's two elder brothers had suddenly arrived from South America and might she bring them to dinner too?

My cousin Pullman says that, though actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he was far from feeling comfortable about the whole affair. He says that whereas his feelings for the beautiful Mrs. Angel

were the very opposite of brotherly, the mere suggestion of such a relationship to Dwight-Rankin filled him with apprehension.

Musing thus, he sat staring at Mrs. Angel. She, thoughtful too, was playing with a ring on the third finger of her right hand. It was a great emerald, shining deep and dark in the shadows where Mrs. Angel sat resting. Staring at it, my cousin Pullman meditated on human vanities, on the worthlessness of precious stones in the ever after, on the salvation of the soul, on money.

"Why," he ventured at last, "don't you sell that emerald? It is, after all, better to sell everything than to dine with Mr. Buggenshaw. Why, a stone like that must be worth a couple of thousand pounds!"

"Oh, it was!" sighed Mrs. Angel. "In fact, two thousand five hundred was what I got for it."

"Do you mean to say," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin, "that you've sold the real emerald and that's a dud?"

"But it's a good dud, isn't it?" smiled Mrs. Angel, holding the great emerald up for him to examine. One can imagine the fellow devouring it with his conceited eyes. One can imagine him twiddling about with it under the light as though he knew a thing or two—which was obviously about all he *did* know.

"I paid forty-two pounds," sighed

Mrs. Angel, "to have that copy made."

Dwight-Rankin at last gave it back to her, complimenting her on a perfect imitation emerald. "I'd bet anything," the fellow added, "that it would take in anybody who didn't know something about emeralds."

My cousin Pullman here makes a confession. He says it was he who suggested that they should try "the emerald" on Mr. Buggenshaw to see if he was as clever as he was rumored to be.

One cannot, in this whole business, help sympathizing with Mr. Buggenshaw. No doubt, he was not a good man. No doubt, he was a grasping and unscrupulous financier. Nevertheless, it appears that he welcomed my cousin Pullman and the fellow Dwight-Rankin in all good faith as Mrs. Angel's brothers, and was more than cordial in his hospitality. Moreover, of the ingredients of that hospitality, both separately and as a whole, my cousin Pullman speaks very highly.

The fellow Dwight-Rankin, it appears, was in high good humor from the very beginning. He did not so much drink the proffered cocktails as delete them. My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw was undoubtedly puzzled by some of the things the fellow said, and that, as they sat down to dinner, it was with an effort that the good man pulled himself together and, turning to the hitherto silent Mrs. Angel, said heartily:

"Well, well, it is indeed a pleasure to see you again, my dear Mrs. Angel. You have not allowed me the privilege for years—not since poor Angel died, I believe."

The last remark, my cousin Pullman says, was unfortunate, as it was well known that Mr. Buggenshaw had so pestered poor Colonel Angel to repay loans which the gallant Colonel had done Mr. Buggenshaw the honor to borrow from him, that the persecuted soldier had embraced death from pneumonia with relief. Therefore, actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, my cousin Pullman was about to change the subject when the fellow Dwight-Rankin, doubtless with the same idea in mind, in so far as he was capable of entertaining an idea, raised his very second-rate voice and said:

"Tell us about yourself, Mr. Buggenshaw. How is business these days? For my part, I am finding the usual difficulties. As a confirmed borrower of twenty years' standing I must say, Mr. B., that I find you moneylenders extraordinarily skeptical about the financial background of a gentleman's word of honor."

One sympathizes with Mr. Buggenshaw. He had been brought up in England on the clear understanding that a gentleman may commit murder but must never (a) shoot a fox, or (b) talk of money. And here, at his very dinner-table, was a so-called gentleman committing (b). My cousin Pullman says that the atmosphere throbbed with Mr.

Buggenshaw's correct indignation.

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw at last, "I do not lend money. I negotiate loans."

My cousin Pullman says that, actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he sought to distract his host by addressing him in the following terms:

"You will no doubt be wondering, sir," said my cousin Pullman, "how it is that my brother and I have different surnames."

"Now you mention it," said Mr. Buggenshaw coldly.

My cousin Pullman was then about to develop a lie or two in a cultured way when the fellow Dwight-Rankin, filling his inferior mouth with caviar, said:

"It is due to the fact that our mother, my dear Mr. B., had a highly developed talent for marriage."

"Quite," said Mr. Buggenshaw coldly.

"In all," continued the fellow Dwight-Rankin, sipping his champagne with offensive enjoyment, "our mother married three times, and we three are each the children of different fathers. Her last two husbands were not, unfortunately, up to the standard set up by the first, who was a remarkably able and handsome man, and whose son I am. Of her second husband, a Mr. Pullman, we cannot say too little. He died of drink, and his son, I regret to say, is an interesting if somewhat unwholesome example of

the effects of heredity on a naturally weak constitution. Her third husband, on the other hand, Mrs. Angel's father, was a very lovable man, but singularly lacking in character. Having gambled away two fortunes, he died of eating pickled herrings on an empty stomach after a night's card-playing and left his daughter penniless—except for that magnificent emerald ring!"

Whereupon the fellow Dwight-Rankin kicked my cousin Pullman under the table to remind him to play up to the exceedingly over-rated joke about the "emerald." But before he could so demean himself, Mr. Buggenshaw had turned to Mrs. Angel with a smile.

"I have," said he, "already remarked your emerald. As you know, Mrs. Angel, I am considered to be something of a connoisseur of precious stones. I therefore take this opportunity of congratulating you on the possession of a singularly fine emerald."

My cousin Pullman says he was thunderstruck. On the other hand, it was with difficulty that the fellow Dwight-Rankin repressed a boorish guffaw. The fellow turned with an objectionable air of solemnity and asked:

"How much, my dear Mr. Buggenshaw, would you, as a connoisseur, say an emerald like that was worth?"

My cousin Pullman says that it was with pleasure he heard Mr. Buggenshaw's dignified rebuke.

"One does not," said he, "talk of money while sitting at table."

"Well, get up and tell me," said the unattractive Dwight-Rankin.

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "if you must know, I could sell that stone tomorrow for two thousand five hundred pounds."

"You're not serious!" gasped my cousin Pullman.

"Seldom," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "have I been more serious."

It was with relief, my cousin Pullman says, that he heard Mrs. Angel's soft voice.

"Don't," she charmingly begged Mr. Buggenshaw, "don't let them tease you. For that is all they are doing. They know as well as I do that this isn't a real emerald at all."

My cousin Pullman says that Dwight-Rankin's uneducated laughter at his host's expense must have been peculiarly offensive to one who, like Mr. Buggenshaw, had been brought up in England on the clear understanding that gentlemen do not laugh with their mouths open. He then swears that the following conversation took place:

MR. B: "You are telling me, my dear Mrs. Angel, that the emerald on your finger is false?"

MRS. A: "Oh, come, Mr. Buggenshaw! Of course it is false! And the boys were just trying to—"

MR. B: "But it is you who are trying to tease me, Mrs. Angel! That stone is no more paste than I am!"

My cousin Pullman says that at this point Dwight-Rankin made an interruption which took this form: "Good old Bug! Go it, baby!"

"Why," said Mr. Buggenshaw, very properly ignoring Dwight-Rankin, "I don't even have to touch that stone to know whether it is real or not! Who told you that it was paste?"

"I didn't have to be told," said Mrs. Angel, "as I had it made for me. It cost me forty-two pounds."

My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw received Mrs. Angel's statement with gentlemanly restraint. The dinner continued. The food was distinguished, the wine peerless.

When they had done, the fellow Dwight-Rankin apparently again began making an ass of himself about that emerald, saying:

"Imagine being taken in by a dud like that!"

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "that is no dud!"

"Haw, haw!" said the fellow Dwight-Rankin. "Good old Bug!"

"I repeat," said Mr. Buggenshaw vehemently, "that Mrs. Angel is the fortunate possessor of a very fine stone worth two thousand pounds."

"You are not serious," said Mrs. Angel.

My cousin Pullman says that nothing made Mr. Buggenshaw more indignant than being told he was not serious.

"But," said Mrs. Angel, "it would be sheer robbery on my part to take

even fifty pounds for a little piece of paste! I might be arrested!"

"Arrested?" said Mr. Buggenshaw. "What for?"

"Good old Bug!" cried the low Dwight-Rankin. "He'd know to a dot what one could be arrested for."

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw, "I resent that."

"Rightly," said the tactful Dwight-Rankin.

My cousin Pullman says that, actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he sought to distract his host's attention by breaking a few plates against the side of the table to the accompaniment of a minstrel song. He denies *in toto* the following allegations: (1) that he was under the influence of wine, (2) that he was under the influence of spirits.

On the contrary, he is ready to go into the witness-box and swear to the following conversation having taken place:

Mrs. A: "Can it be that I am mistaken?"

Mr. B: "It should not be possible—but that is a real emerald, Mrs. Angel."

D-R: "Good old Bug! What a man! What a connoisseur!"

Mr. B: "Sir, I was not speaking to you."

D-R: "As your guest, Mr. B., I resent that."

My cousin Pullman says that at this point he would have arisen and left the building to mark his disapproval of Dwight-Rankin, had not the butler chosen that moment to

pour him out a spot of brandy. As for the affair of the emerald ring, that was now quite beyond him. He was listening to the discussion with only half an ear, when a word woke him up. Nothing can be gained by concealing the fact that the word was "banknotes."

"What!" said my cousin Pullman, startled.

Mrs. Angel looked round at him.

"Can you imagine it!" she laughed excitedly. "He is offering me two thousand pounds for this thing!"

"In banknotes," said the attractive Mr. Buggenshaw. "I always keep a certain amount of ready cash on hand."

"But *look* at it!" cried Mrs. Angel, pulling off her ring and giving it to him. "You will see at once that it's only paste."

My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw's expression while examining the stone was one which manifested all the earmarks of an unusual degree of pleasure. He gave it back to Mrs. Angel with a smile.

"I shall get more than two thousand for it, Mrs. Angel," was all he said.

"And I can't be arrested for selling you an imitation stone?"

"The police cannot, and your conscience should not, trouble you, Mrs. Angel. You are not selling the ring under false pretenses."

"All the same, Mr. Buggenshaw, I am not going to let you spend such a large sum without first consulting

an expert. I simply insist on that much, at least."

"As you wish, Mrs. Angel. But you are being unnecessarily careful of my interests. However, I will just ask Curzon to step round. He is a jeweler."

"Curzon?" said Dwight-Rankin. "You don't mean Curzon of Loot and Curzon, the pawnbrokers?"

"You know him?" said the good Mr. Buggenshaw.

"Since infancy," said Dwight-Rankin nastily, "I have scarcely had time to know anyone else."

After dinner they entered a drawing-room furnished, my cousin Pullman says, in the earlier motion-picture manner with certain modifications showing a Tottenham Court Road influence. There, while the good Mr. Buggenshaw showed Mrs. Angel the sights, the fellow Dwight-Rankin drew my cousin Pullman aside and, recommending him to help himself to the cigars, as it was unlikely they would ever be asked to Mr. Buggenshaw's house again, whispered:

"I shall never hold up my head again if she doesn't get all she can out of him for that dud stone. Do you realize that two thousand pounds was the sum he kept dunning poor Angel for before he died, though he had actually lent him only five hundred pounds?"

"Did he get the two thousand pounds?"

"Eventually," said Dwight-Ran-

kin gloomily, "from the estate. So he really did *her* out of fifteen hundred pounds, you see."

"But is the emerald *really* a dud?"

Dwight-Rankin looked pityingly at my cousin Pullman. "Didn't she," said the fellow, "tell us it was a dud?"

"Yes, but—" said my cousin Pullman.

"Then don't ask silly questions," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin.

At that moment Mr. Curzon was shown in. Dwight-Rankin and Mrs. Angel sat down to a game of bezique, while the situation was briefly explained to Mr. Curzon by Mr. Buggenshaw. The expressions of the two as they stood whispering together were fraught, says my cousin Pullman, with possibilities of immediate financial loss to gentlefolk. He was therefore actuated by the highest motives of chivalry in quietly approaching them and trying to catch what they were saying. Seeing, however, that Mr. Curzon was watching him, my cousin Pullman assumed a nonchalant air and, sipping his brandy with *savoir faire*, said gayly:

"May I say, Mr. Buggenshaw, that this is very fine old brandy?"

"Nothing," said the good Mr. Buggenshaw, "gives me more pleasure than to hear that you have at last come to the conclusion that it is brandy. From the action of your elbow for a considerable time past I could only judge that you were under the impression that you were drinking lager-beer."

My cousin Pullman says that he resented this unjust attack so bitterly that nothing could have prevented him from shaking the dust of the house from his feet forever had he not felt that it would be shameful to desert his friends.

My cousin Pullman then swears to the following conversation having taken place:

MR. B: "Would you be so kind as to allow my friend Curzon to examine your emerald?"

MRS. A: (*Giving it to him*) "With pleasure!"

MR. B: (*Giving it to Mr. C.*) "Thank you."

MR. C: (*Receiving it*) "Thank you."

My cousin Pullman says that he was watching the proceedings with an eagle eye. Nothing, he says, escaped him. He concentrated in particular on Mr. Curzon's face with such a degree of intensity that he could, he says, draw a map of it from memory. Mr. Curzon's features were arranged by Nature with a view to expressing (a) suspicion, (b) skepticism, (c) incredulity, and (d) downright disbelief. But so great was the effect produced on him by the emerald that, my cousin Pullman says, those same features straightway rearranged themselves into a form very often assumed by the faces of stamp collectors—Mr. Curzon radiated a childlike delight. "What a beautiful stone!" said Mr. Curzon.

"You mean," said Mrs. Angel,

looking up from her cards, "what a beautiful imitation!"

"Imitation?" cried Mr. Curzon. "I would like to meet the man who can make 'imitations' like this!"

My cousin Pullman says he was now convinced that Mrs. Angel had made a mistake.

Mr. Curzon gave the ring back to Mrs. Angel.

"If my good friend Buggenshaw," said he playfully, "is offering you two thousand pounds for it, you may be sure he will sell it for half that again."

"You're not serious!" said Dwight-Rankin.

"You can't be!" sighed Mrs. Angel. "Considering I had the thing made for me for forty-two pounds."

My cousin Pullman says that the positions of everyone immediately preceding the *dénouement* were as follows:

Mrs. Angel sat looking thoughtfully at the ring in the palm of her hand.

Mr. B. and Mr. C., standing, looked playfully at each other.

Dwight-Rankin sat drinking brandy.

My cousin Pullman stood at Mrs. Angel's shoulder. His mind was troubled.

He was awakened from his uneasy reverie by Mrs. Angel asking him to lend her the fine linen handkerchief with which my cousin Pullman always adorns his breast-pocket, such being the vogue among the quality. He admits to an anxiety about the

toy; which no doubt does him honor as a man of fashion. Never, he says, had that handkerchief been held to the nose for any but a strictly decorative purpose. Fearful, therefore, lest Mrs. Angel had contracted a cold in the head, a thing that might happen to anyone, he was about to turn his back upon the impending humiliation of his handkerchief when he was relieved, he was elated, to see that Mrs. Angel, far from putting it to base utilitarian uses, was but polishing her emerald with it. After which, giving it back to him—its temporary absence from his breast-pocket having given him the feeling, he says, of being almost undressed—she looked at the ring with a sad smile.

"I should have thought," said she softly, "that anyone could see it was paste!"

"Then surely," said Mr. Curzon cheerfully, "you can have no reason for refusing to sell it to Mr. Buggenshaw for two thousand pounds."

"But won't he be annoyed when he comes to sell it and is told that it's worth nothing?"

"Ha—ha!" laughed Mr. Buggenshaw. "Well, a joke's a joke. Now, Mrs. Angel, may I bring you two thousand pounds from my safe?"

"I can't do it!" sighed Mrs. Angel finally, rising from her chair.

My cousin Pullman says he drew a breath of relief. Convinced now that the emerald was real, he felt positive that Mrs. Angel could sell it for more than the sum offered. Imagine,

then, his consternation at hearing Mrs. Angel add that, unwilling as she was to sell a stone she knew was false, she would, under pressure, let it go for a mere fifteen hundred pounds. The transaction was straightaway carried through on those terms. My cousin Pullman could do no more than stand by and watch while Mr. Buggenshaw, having playfully inserted a roll of banknotes into Mrs. Angel's vanity-bag, held out his hand for the emerald ring. Mrs. Angel, however, still appeared to hesitate. My cousin Pullman was delighted to notice a look of discouragement communicate itself from the face of Mr. Curzon to that of Mr. Buggenshaw. But, alas, such hopes were instantly dashed to the ground. Mrs. Angel held out her ring. The following conversation then took place:

MRS. A: "Mr. Buggenshaw, I sell you this emerald for fifteen hundred pounds on the clear understanding that in my opinion it is a paste imitation."

MR. B: "It is indeed a pleasure, Mrs. Angel, to do business with a lady of honor."

MRS. A: "These gentlemen are all witnesses of the contract."

ALL: "We are."

MRS. A: "You in particular, Mr. Curzon—I hope I can rely on you as a witness."

MR. C: "You can."

Whereupon the ring passed into Mr. Buggenshaw's eager hand, a bottle of champagne was opened to

celebrate the transaction, and, says my cousin Pullman, since it was by then close on midnight, a move was made by Mrs. Angel and her two cavaliers towards the door. The good Mr. Buggenshaw did them the honor to escort them, and while the butler was seeking a taxicab in the neighborhood, the four stood on the door-step exchanging compliments and expressions of mutual esteem.

At the very same moment, however, that the taxicab drove up, something happened that radically altered the amiable exterior of the situation. This was the sudden appearance of Mr. Curzon from the drawing-room. Had it, of course, been a mere appearance, the situation could not have been instantly and radically disturbed. But it was more. Mr. Curzon can be said to have exploded. Nor, says my cousin Pullman, was this singular detonation unaccompanied by sundry outward signs of extraordinary upheavals within Mr. Curzon's person. Mr. Curzon's features, in particular, assumed an arrangement that left no room whatsoever for expressing his faith in the life everlasting and the brotherhood of man.

"This," shouted Mr. Curzon, brandishing the emerald, "is an imitation!"

"Well," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin, "who said it wasn't?"

My cousin Pullman says he lacks words with which to describe the

scene that then took place. There was a moment when he thought that nothing could save him from being embroiled in a vulgar fracas. It was Mrs. Angel who put an end to the painful situation by stepping haughtily into the taxicab. The fellow Dwight-Rankin, says my cousin Pullman, only made matters worse by telling Mr. Curzon to go and boil his head.

But how, my cousin Pullman asked himself, two grown-up men like Mr. Buggenshaw and Mr. Curzon could first be misled by an imitation emerald into buying the same against every warning and then complain that it was imitation—how they could be so misguided, left him amazed and unsympathetic. He followed Mrs. Angel and Dwight-Rankin into the taxicab with a feeling, he says, of deep impatience at Mr. Buggenshaw's levity. Nor could he bring himself to reason politely with Mr. Curzon, whose levity took the form of insisting vociferously that the ring Mrs. Angel had finally handed over to Mr. Buggenshaw was not the same as that which he, Mr. Curzon, had examined and found good.

However, it was patent even to the two excited financiers that they hadn't, as the saying is, a leg to stand on. The good Mr. Buggenshaw's own butler couldn't but swear in a court of law to Mrs. Angel's honesty in repeatedly insisting on the falseness of the emerald. Nevertheless the *dénouement* had

been so far from agreeable that my cousin Pullman could sympathize with Mrs. Angel's silence during the drive home. She spoke not a word until, at her door, he was about to help her alight, when she again asked him for the loan of his handkerchief. My cousin Pullman could not help wishing that she would try Dwight-Rankin's for a change, and indeed was about to suggest that, on the ground that his was soiled, when he noticed Dwight-Rankin grinning at him in a peculiar way. Whereupon, handing his handker-

chief over with the best grace he could, he was thunderstruck at seeing the exquisite Mrs. Angel open it out in her lap and extract an emerald ring.

My cousin Pullman says it was at that moment that he made the vow which, since he has kept it religiously, has caused no end of inconvenience to people crowding against him at balls, dinner-parties and such-like places at which society gathers.

He carries a revolver in his hip pocket.

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Thomas Walsh

Danger in the Shadows

Thomas Walsh has written nearly every type of detective-crime-mystery short story—from the purely deductive to the adventurous thriller, from studies in suspense to studies in character, not excluding the hardboiled and semi-hardboiled, the tough and not-too-tough tales of cops and robbers . . . and yet "Danger in the Shadows" is different from all these, in approach, style, and emotional intent.

IT WAS JAMES FRANCIS PHELAN WHO made the mistake, being very certain where Barbara was doubtful, and recognizing, without any doubt, stands and buildings and signposts she could not recall as those they had passed on their way in. But after they came to the exit gate and looked around for the parking lot that should have been just outside, even James Francis Phelan saw that he was wrong.

Barbara did not say that she could have told him so: she had been Mrs. James Francis Phelan just two days. But he caught her tired smile.

"Here," he said. "I can get the car back here by myself all right. You, honey—you go over to that bench there and take it easy for a while. When you see the old jalopy pull up by that traffic light come on out—but not before."

When he had deposited her on the bench by the exit gate, he touched her right wrist with concern and tenderness—a dark-haired young man, lean and well-shouldered with a soft

ness in his dark eyes when he looked at her.

"What's more," he said, "I'll have no carrying on with these city slickers while I'm gone. Mind now!"

"Silly," she said. But she couldn't help smiling at him.

"Silly, huh?" He held up her chin with his palm. "If that's the case—okay then. I'm not going to miss you at all. My heart won't be the least bit sore all the time I'm—"

"All the time," she said smiling still. "Twenty minutes, perhaps."

"Twenty years," James Francis Phelan told her solemnly. "Twenty ages, my girl. Twenty eternities."

He grinned and was off—James Francis Phelan, twenty-four, counselor at law of Atwood, Nebraska. His slim figure dwindled and vanished down the upright perspective of the Fair walls, blurred over now by the thickening shadows of dusk.

Mrs. James Francis Phelan, sitting primly by herself on the end of the bench, thought of what a—a dear idiot he was. She remembered the

poems he had scribbled slapdash on long legal sheets and dispatched special delivery to her—all headed, quite naturally, "to Barbara." She even recalled indulgently how he had insisted on lunching solely on soup for two whole months to get enough labels to enter some silly contest.

James Francis Phelan hadn't thought it was silly; he was certain, no question at all about it, where the prize was going to land. But then—she sighed a bit—he was certain of so many things. The contest, the way he'd get on when the breaks came, the right gate out of the World's Fair just now—She smiled faintly to herself. She wouldn't have James Francis Phelan changed from what he was for anything in the world.

People passed in and out about her while she sat there and waited for him—hundreds of people, thousands of people. Cars shot by on the road before her, darkness gathered imperceptibly; she began to feel—how absurd it was!—very small, very lonely, very lost.

Sitting there, her hands folded in her lap, she had a delicate young face and clear brown eyes as grave and candid as a child's. She waited quietly for Jimmy to come back, depressed a little by the careless hurry of the crowd about her.

It was a relief, when the twenty minutes had passed, to get up and to walk from the bench to the winking traffic signal by the intersection. It must have taken him longer than he

had imagined it would to find the brown coupé in all those countless others. She did not begin to worry until it was half-past eight and he had been gone an hour; then, standing on the edge of the curb, she began to watch anxiously the approaching cars.

At nine she told herself that she knew what it was—the roads, the gates, the traffic lights were all quite similar. Confused somehow, he'd be searching for her now at some other gate. Should she wait for him here, or should she go back to their room?

At nine thirty she flagged a cab. He would be home, of course, at the pleasant little house where they had found a room last night, worried sick because he'd missed her. Where else could he be? Something shone, vivid and pale, in her mind—she saw a crash, a narrow hospital room, James Francis Phelan limp in the bed.

But she would not let herself think of those things.

He was not waiting for her at the rooming house; there was no message from him. She pretended to the landlady that it was very funny and she told her what they'd seen that day at the Fair—the World of Tomorrow and the Perisphere and the Man-made Lightning and Television and the Railroad Exposition. But while she spoke, coldness was spreading inside her. He couldn't be—hurt. He couldn't be—

In their room upstairs she sat and turned over the pages of a magazine.

Someone came in, up the stairs, and passed her door.

Eleven. Her throat felt dry; the quietness of the house and of the street deepened and pressed in her ears. Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy—

She got up and moved about the room. She was angry with him; worrying her like this and spoiling everything—making her imagine dreadful things and fret her heart out. Then the coldness swept through her body and shook it like a wind. Ten past eleven, twenty past eleven. Something rose in her throat; she held it down, her teeth forced together.

At twenty-five minutes to twelve, in the drugstore around the corner, a drug clerk looked curiously at her and told her the way to the police station.

When, at seven thirty that evening, James Francis Phelan walked into the right parking lot, a stocky man leaning against the fender of a black sedan two cars down from the brown coupé with the Nebraska license looked up at him briefly with stolid gray eyes. The pavement around the stocky man was littered with cigarette stubs; he had been waiting there three hours.

When he saw James Francis Phelan approach the brown coupé with his key in his hand, the stocky man straightened and glanced casually up and down the line of cars. There was no one, at the moment, near them.

The stocky man had a thought:

why not here? Why not now? No need of a story to get him quietly out of the place; where could they find a better spot than this? He moved up almost idly and circled the back of the brown coupé; his hand came out from under his coat bearing something half as long as his forearm—soft, heavy, covered with cloth.

James Francis Phelan, bent slightly to get into the coupé, half turned in surprise when he felt the stocky man so close to him. He had a glimpse of the stolid face, the lips stretched a little, the gray eyes glittering and ugly. Then the sandbag smashed into the side of his skull very skillfully—hard enough, but not too hard; he slumped forward into the car and the stocky man helped him on with a shove of his arm.

It was done quickly, without a sound. With the ignition on, the car in gear, the stocky man swung it around in the open lane and headed it down for the gate. He stopped some yards before it, sheltered from the attendant by the last line of cars; he called, "Eddie," in a low voice.

Eddie appeared at once, around the side of a gray convertible. He opened the car door, straightened James Francis Phelan up in the seat, got in and held the limp figure erect by squeezing his own body against it. "Okay," he said then, his lips twitching nervously. "Okay, Arnold. Get us out of here fast."

They weren't stopped at the exit. They were just three men crowded

together in a narrow coupé. Eddie sat with one arm around James Francis Phelan's shoulders. They went on through side streets for twenty minutes to a quiet thoroughfare of brick-row houses that had high stoops and open porches facing the road and squat white garage doors built in beneath the terraces. Halfway along that Arnold swung the car in on a driveway; Eddie got out and pulled up the garage door. Then the car rolled down gently and the door descended behind it.

In the garage Arnold grunted: "Easy now. Take his feet." Between them they carried James Francis Phelan through a narrow opening into a basement rumpus room beyond. They laid him on the couch there and Arnold stared down at him.

"I'll fix him up," he said. "I'll keep him nice and quiet. You go and get Fid English."

Fid English was out on a date. It was after eleven before he showed up with Eddie—at a time when, eighteen blocks away, Mrs. James Francis Phelan had looked out on an empty street. In the kitchen over the rumpus room Arnold sat moodily across the table from a slender man with a haggard white face, and eyes bright and black behind horn-rimmed spectacles. The slender man wore a blue suit and a stiff collar; his trousers were shiny along the seams.

When Fid English came in with Eddie, Arnold smiled thinly at him. "Frank Barber," he said, presenting him to Fid English with a prod of his

thumb. "My sister's husband, Fid. Remember Dolly? She's away for the week end; drove down to Rockaway with some friends this afternoon. So we got this place all to ourselves."

"That's nice," Fid English said. He had a wide smile that expressed nothing. "Throwing a party, Arnold?"

"No party," Arnold said, smiling too. "Business, Fid. Big business, I'd say. Frank here works for Jansenius and Company—they make Grandma's Canned Soups. He's private secretary to Mr. Grandma Jansenius himself. For forty-seven-fifty a week."

"Forty-two-fifty," Frank Barber whispered. His lips twitched briefly in a small sharp motion. "Since the cut. With the house to pay on. With the car—"

"That's right," Arnold said. "Forty-two-fifty since the cut, Fid. This morning I run in to see Frank at the office to get a few bucks, but Frank ain't got any dough for me. Besides, he's all-steamed up about something that just happened. He's so mad he confides in me, which he don't do ordinarily. Not Frankie."

"Grandma's Soups been running a contest. Twenty-five thousand bucks for fifty words on why you like their dishwater—for fifty words and fifty labels off their cans. The contest was over last week, Fid; this morning the guy in charge comes around to old Jansenius with the name of the guy they pick out as the winner. Frank's

in there with the boss, doing some filing, but he's a pretty quiet guy, Frank is, and they don't happen to see him behind the cabinets. So—"

"I might be wood," Frank Barber said, throaty and low. "I might be—"

"All right," Arnold said. He looked angry. "Lemme talk, will you? The letter they picked out as the best was written by a guy named James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska. It's a big secret, understand; nobody but the advertising guy and old Jansenius is supposed to know it yet. They got some dope on him—they always check up to make sure the prize don't go to some tramp that will give the product a bad name. And the advertising guy gives Jansenius the dope they got on Phelan.

"He's a young guy, twenty-four, a year out of law school. Nice boy, clean liver, good family—just the kind of guy they want to boost their stuff. He ain't in Atwood now, though—left there ten days ago to see a girl in Syracuse he went to college with, and to take in the World's Fair here. A vacation, understand."

Fid English listened silently. He was about James Francis Phelan's height and weight, with sullen-looking black eyes and slick black hair.

"This contest," Arnold said, "this contest they're going to pay off in cash—twenty-five grand in ten-dollar bills. Old Jansenius figures there'll be a hell of a bigger wallop in that

than in just a check. When he hears this Phelan is coming to New York he thinks that's swell; he's got it all doped out how they can make every newsreel and tabloid in the country and get some swell publicity. As soon as Phelan gets here and registers at a hotel, they'll get hold of him and bring him down to the office and have his picture taken by every cameraman in town.

"Our angle, Fid—our angle is that they ain't got an idea in the world what this Phelan looks like. If somebody with his car, somebody with his driver's license, somebody with his name, checks in at a hotel tonight—sometime tomorrow that guy walks out of Jansenius' office with twenty-five thousand bucks in his mitts. Cash, Fid. Clean, understand. No way of tracing it back."

"So what?" Fid English asked. "What kind of a pipe dream you seein'? If we had his car—if we had his license—"

"We got 'em, Fid. We got him downstairs. As soon as I heard Frank's story, I figured this Phelan might be in New York already, because he left Nebraska ten days ago; only I think—why, maybe he ain't at any hotel, the only places old Jansenius tried to find him. How much dough do young lawyers make? Not much, I thought. And out around the Fair—remember what it looks like? Houses renting out rooms. Cheap. A buck or two a night. So if he was stopping out there—well, I took a chance. I got hold of

Eddie right after I left Frank and we went out nosing through the parking lots at the Fair.

"For just a smell of twenty-five grand I'd cover every garage in New York. All me and Eddie had to lose was time. So—we got out there around noon. All we knew was that the guy, if he was inside, would have a Nebraska car—but even then it wasn't as tough as it seemed at first. Once we knew what a Nebraska license looked like we could cover a row in a couple of minutes or so.

"Every time we spotted one we went through it. And then after four hours we hit the right one; we know that because there's a gas bill from a garage in Atwood, Nebraska, stuck in the glove compartment and made out to J. F. Phelan. We hang around then; we take care of him when he comes out and get him out here.

"And there it is, Fid. Jansenius won't figure on a ringer; so far as he knows, himself and the advertising guy is the only two who have any idea of the winner's name. So he won't be suspicious. And this Phelan—he come East alone, understand. There's nobody with him to raise a stink if he don't come home tonight."

"Maybe I fit in somewhere," Fid English said. "Only I don't see any spot."

"You're his age," Arnold said. "You're his build. And you're handy with a pen. Say they make you sign something—why, you practice a little tonight and tomorrow you can

put down his signature just like it's here on the license. See how it all fits in? They don't suspect anything crooked because they don't think the name of the winner is out. And they find you at a hotel—you don't find them. Who's gonna even think you ain't James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska? Who's—"

"Wait a minute," Fid English said. "They're gonna have my picture—those cameramen—"

"They sell dark glasses, don't they?" Arnold asked him. "If you had sore eyes after driving all that way East—where's anything funny in that, or in keeping them on against the lights? And Eddie here knows a guy that can change you so you wouldn't know yourself. He'll take you over there first thing in the morning. They'll have a picture—sure. But it won't be you. Not the way you look now."

"Nothin' goes wrong, huh?" Fid English said. He looked slightly worried. "It's always squab on toast talkin' about it. But—"

"You'll have his car," Arnold said. "You'll have his name and his license. And tonight you go in to the city and register at the Pilgrim House. Where's anything to trip you up? Here—" He took a pencil out of his pocket and looked around the table; his hand went out to a packet of matches, folded back the flap, and wrote a phone number on the inside.

"That's Frank's phone; he's only been livin' here two months so he

ain't in the book yet. Call us up when you're settled—only not from the hotel. They might keep a list of the calls you make out from there and trace it here after the blowoff. Go out to a drugstore. We'll let you know how things are on this end."

"Meanin' him?" Fid English asked. He pointed one finger at the floor.

"We're goin' to worry about him," Arnold said. "We're goin' to worry about him a lot."

Fid English got up slowly.

"Okay," he said. "I'm in, Arnold. Where's his car?"

"Frank'll show you. We'll be waitin' for that call; make it"—he looked up at the clock—"make it about one. When we know that you're set we'll take care of the boy friend downstairs. Here's Frank's number."

The matches sailed through the air. At the doorway Fid English snapped them in with one hand and dropped them in his pocket.

It was getting on toward twelve when he drove off from the brick house in James Francis Phelan's car; some distance north, in the nearest precinct house, a heavy-faced man named Cassidy had done about everything by then a conscientious desk sergeant could do for a scared-looking girl who was worried about her husband. He checked on all the accidents and he covered all the hospitals, and when nothing turned up he was as comforting as possible.

There was no sense to worrying about it, Desk Sergeant Cassidy told her; maybe her husband had bumped into some friends from home and gone off somewhere for a couple of beers. Or perhaps he was still looking for her out at the Fair. If he was missing in the morning—well, it would be time enough to look for trouble then. Now she'd better go home.

"Thank you," Mrs. Phelan said in her soft voice. "Thank you very much. That would be best, wouldn't it? Of course he'll be—"

She turned quickly, with a set smile on her lips, and went out. Cassidy stared after her, vaguely troubled. How long, he wondered, was she out of high school? A nice sweet girl like that—

She stayed in his mind. He tried to picture the kind of man that would leave her alone to eat her heart out, and he didn't have much success. What would the answer be? A quarrel maybe, so that to punish her he'd have gone off for the night to some hotel? Cassidy hadn't much faith in that, but it was the only thing he could think of; so that presently, picking up the phone, he put a call in to headquarters, where they could cover the city quicker than from here. James Francis Phelan, of Atwood, Nebraska—would they try the hotels on that and call back later to Cassidy's precinct? Then he hung up, made a note on the pad for his relief, and forgot all about it.

But five minutes later, at mid-

night when he came off duty, he found her standing on the corner outside the precinct house—looking as if she didn't know what to do or where to go. He became gruffly impatient with her but he drove her home.

And he waited outside in his car, too, while she went into the house. When she came out again her face seemed whiter than her dress. She only shook her head at Cassidy without a word.

He grunted shortly, sighed, and opened the car door.

"Get in now," he said more gently. "We'll have some coffee. It's what you need to buck you up."

Later, in the all-night lunchroom, he shot dark glances at her from under his shaggy brows. Was it a quarrel they'd had?

"No." She smiled painfully at him. "You see—we've been married just two days. And we—we never had a quarrel. He just said that he didn't want me to walk all the way to the car. So—"

It came out bit by bit then, how they'd gone to college together and how they'd been engaged ever since their graduation. But they couldn't marry, not for a while, not until he was making more money out in Atwood, Nebraska. And then he came East and stopped in Syracuse to see her—the first time they'd seen each other in eight months. All at once then the money hadn't seemed to matter; they knew they'd make out some way. So they were married

very quietly, never intending to beforehand; and they'd been very happy, and if he was hurt now, if he was—

"There'll be none of that," Cassidy said uncomfortably. "Has he friends here? Is there anyone he might have decided to visit?"

"No. No one at all. That's why—" Her breath caught a little. When he had finished his coffee he drove her back to the rooming house. It was half-past twelve then, but the brown coupé still wasn't in the driveway. They sat there a while, waiting, Cassidy trying to be cheerful, before he thought of calling the precinct house.

There was a phone in the hall; she waited in the car while he used it. When Cassidy came out his heavy face looked darker than usual. They'd heard from headquarters, he said, that a James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska, had registered that night at the Pilgrim House. And what did she think of that?

He lost his anger as soon as he saw her face—he'd have staked his soul on the blind terror there.

"No," she whispered. "Why, he couldn't do that, Mr. Cassidy. We never had a word; we never—"

She stopped there; but Cassidy heard the breath she had to fight for. It was then that he decided to have a word with this Mr. James Phelan—a word in private, and undisturbed. He drove fast; at one o'clock precisely they got out of his car before the Pilgrim House.

But they had to wait a while there; no one answered the phone in Mr. Phelan's room. So Cassidy sat with her on a lounge facing the desk—five minutes, ten, fifteen. Every time a man came in he felt her head turn; every time a man passed he watched her hands clench white in her lap. Fifteen minutes of that was enough for Cassidy. Quite abruptly he got up and marched over to the desk. Mr. Phelan couldn't have come in another door?

"Mr. Phelan?" the clerk repeated. He looked past Cassidy's shoulders to the elevators. "Why—he just left a call for seven tomorrow. That man in the gray suit—getting in the elevator. Didn't you see him here?"

Cassidy had seen him well enough; he was sure the girl had too. Going back to her, his face was troubled.

"That fella," Cassidy asked her, "that fella in the gray suit that just went by. Did you see him?"

"Yes." She looked up at him—no recognition in her eyes. "He stopped at the desk there and—Why?"

Cassidy couldn't answer that why himself. James Francis Phelan—but not the James Francis Phelan his wife knew. His mind began to turn every which way thinking it over.

"Sit here now," he said at last. "I'll not be gone long. There's just something I've thought of to do."

He got the room number from the clerk, went up alone in the elevator, walked down a narrow deep-carpeted corridor, and rapped at a door. The young man in the gray suit

opened it. Cassidy pushed by him, looked around, and turned by the bed.

"I want James Francis Phelan," he said.

Fid English, back from a drink in the grill and from the phone call he'd made out to Queens—everything copacetic, everything fine—made one mistake there; he thought the big man couldn't move fast. But before he had the gun clear of his pocket the big man was on him, twisting his wrist up savagely, with a strength Fid English couldn't match. His shot came a fraction too late—when the gun wasn't pointed to the big man but back on himself. The breast of his gray coat lost its grayness.

When Cassidy, with the gun, wrenched free of him, Fid English slid backward against the door, down that to the dark rug, kicked his left leg a little, and then stopped moving. Cassidy turned him over, but it wasn't any use; he was as dead then as one man could be, and there was nothing he was going to say about James Francis Phelan.

For what seemed a long time Cassidy knelt by him, his brows drawn down, his eyes shining darkly. Then there were voices and steps in the hall, and someone hammering on the door.

The someone was the house detective; a couple of plainclothesmen showed up soon after. They didn't have much to say when Cassidy finished his story. There was nothing in

the dead man's clothing, or in the room, to make things any clearer.

One of them showed Cassidy some sheets of writing paper, for instance, that had been lying on the desk—sheets covered over, line after line, with the signature of James Francis Phelan. Toward the end it duplicated exactly the one on the driver's license they had taken from the dead man's pocket.

"This girl," the young plainclothesman said. "You think she's all right, Cassidy—up here?" He tapped his head. "If a man registers here as Phelan, with his car and his license and his name—"

Cassidy said a little sourly: "And then sits down and practices the signature he's written all his life—and then pulls a gun on me the minute I tell him what I'm here for—" He tapped his own head angrily. "The girl's all right there, me mastermind! Are you?"

"He ain't Phelan," the other plainclothesman said. "Not if the girl's right. Phelan never was in New York before—this guy's wearing a suit he bought here—three or four months ago by the looks of it. A hat too. See that?"

They saw it but it didn't give any of them any ideas. Thinking pretty somberly of the girl downstairs and of what they were going to say to her, Cassidy got a cigar out of his pocket and hunted for a match. The first ones he saw were in the fold-over packet that was lying on top of the heap of things they had taken

out of Fid English's pocket. The moment he opened them he saw the writing inside the cover.

It was the only thing they had to try that wasn't either plain crazy or Nebraska. The telephone company, after a little fuss, matched it up with a name and an address; then they went downstairs and picked up the girl. Cassidy just told her that they might have some idea now where to find her husband. Even there she wasn't much help. She could only tell them that, so far as she knew, her husband had never known anybody named Frank A. Barber in his life.

It was getting on to two when they left the Pilgrim House; it was five minutes later that Frank Barber came in through his kitchen door, rubbed a hand across his mouth, and nodded a sick white face at Arnold.

"I put my car in the garage downstairs," he said. "Like you told me to, Arnold. He's—I heard him kicking around down there."

"Who's outside?" Arnold asked. "Anybody around?"

Frank Barber shook his head dumbly.

"Arnold," he said, "listen, Arnold. You aren't going to do anything crazy now. Why should you? We can let him go tomorrow, after we got the money. There's no sense—"

Arnold looked up at him. He said:

"He seen your house downstairs

— long enough to get everything in it set in his mind. And he seen me at the parking place. When the cops find out what happened, they'll know there was a leak somewhere. With Phelan around to help, they'd trail it back here inside a day. But no Phelan, no trace-back, Frank."

"Yes," Frank Barber said. "But—"

"We're gonna take him out now to a nice quiet place I know about, Frank. We're gonna stuff him so deep in a swamp there that he ain't gonna be found for a hundred million years. And you, Frank—you're gonna help us, pal. You're gonna drive the car. Because it's gonna be something to remember, understand—something to hold you up when that lily liver of yours starts jumping. Down the stairs, Frank; it's time to roll."

"No," Frank Barber said. "No. I never figured—"

Arnold knocked his head from right to left with a vicious slap.

"Down the stairs," he said.

Frank Barber started down them, stumbling, his eyes blurred with tears of pain and fright. In the basement room James Francis Phelan had been conscious for a long while, and now, as soon as the light clicked on, his eyes shone at them angrily over the gag, his mouth made mumbled protesting sounds under it. Arnold looked at the cords about his arms and legs, and tightened the gag; then he lifted his shoulders and Eddie grabbed his legs.

They threshed once or twice; Eddie snarled at him. Then, while Frank Barber held the garage door open, they carried him through, around the side of a cheap new sedan, and dumped him on the floor in back. Then the two of them got in.

"Push up that door," Arnold said. "If anybody's outside wait. We ain't in no rush. This guy'll keep."

Not a sound in the street; one lone car rounding the avenue corner. Frank Barber whispered something to himself; when Arnold snarled at him he scurried back, got in behind the wheel and closed the door. He started back fast up the incline, let the clutch out too soon, and stalled halfway up. When he swung around on the road at last, the car he had seen at the corner stopped beside him.

It was too dark up on the porches for Cassidy to make out the numbers, no matter how he squinted and bent sideways from the wheel.

"Where would 4221 be?" he asked the other driver, not really looking at him, peering over his hood toward an unreadable glitter of silvered numerals on the porch door. "Somewhere along here?"

The other man didn't answer him; Cassidy had a dim impression of a bony white face and horn-rimmed spectacles.

He repeated sharply, "4221. Where would I find that?"

Someone else, in the back of the other car, said: "Two blocks down, buddy. Straight ahead."

Cassidy grunted and eased into gear. There was some noise in the back seat of the other car—a brief not overloud scuffle. Cassidy didn't pay very much attention to it; somebody with a drink or two starting home.

Then, just after they started to move, he understood what the other voice had said: two blocks down. Two blocks down, when there'd been a light on 4204 back along the row? Fool drunks. Crazy as—

He heard the other voice again as he braked his car.

"Get it in first! Get it out of here before they—"

Cassidy did instinctively the only thing he could have done. He swung his wheel over hard as the other car raced into life beside him. There was a crashing jar; fenders ripped and crumpled in a jagged sound. Then Cassidy's heavy car had the other pinned in to the curb and Cassidy was out with his gun in his hand and the two plainclothesmen were right behind him.

There wasn't much of a scuffle. A stocky man, fighting to get out of the sedan, cursed and grabbed for something in his pocket; the young plainclothesman, Cassidy's mastermind, floored him with what seemed a lazy blow of his gun barrel. The other man in back put up no argument. Cassidy himself lifted Frank Barber away from the wheel as if he'd been a child.

The girl was out then too, crying and speaking and laughing all at

once, crouched down against the door in the back of Frank Barber's crumpled sedan. Cassidy heard, for the first time that night, and before ever he saw the face, a voice that could only be the voice of James Francis Phelan.

"Hello," it said. "Hello, honey. Was I a long time getting back?"

Long after three, in the little room that yesterday had been the only one they could afford, Mr. and Mrs. James Francis Phelan lay wakeful in the dark. He was full of ideas; his voice went on and on in a happy low rumble. They'd build a house, of course, whatever kind she wanted, with everything in it she asked for; they'd get a decent car; and they'd buy that cop a fine watch or something like that. Because now they could certainly do a lot of things on twenty-five thousand dollars cash.

"Yes," Mrs. James Francis Phelan answered to that. "Yes, Jimmy." But to her, of all that night, it was only the last hour that wasn't real—the bare room in the precinct house and the skinny man in the horn-rimmed spectacles wringing his hands and blubbering while the other two sat sullenly by. Mr. Cassidy had got the whole story from him—his job, the conversation he'd overheard that morning, the contest, and the prize that was waiting for James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska. But she couldn't believe it yet.

"Why," James Francis Phelan said, "I knew—I had a feeling all the time I was going to win that one, honey. I was as sure of it as I was of anything.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," he went on huskily, "just for writing some words—for eating some soup. Why, honey—it's the easiest money we're ever going to make."

"Yes," she whispered. But she knew that with her it would always be the hardest. Suddenly the tears came, in a hot and anguished flood. He held her close, murmuring soft things, nothing sensible, while he smiled faintly over her head at the window.

Crying like that, when everything was wonderful . . .



Roy Vickers

The Man Who Married Too Often

Another gripping investigation by the D.D.E.—the elephant-memoried, never-say-die Department of Dead Ends, the world's most patient, painstaking bureau of professional pursuers who never know they are beaten because they never dream of giving up . . . Like the tales of the F.B.I. and the C.I.D., may the tales of the D.D.E. go on forever.

IF THE MARCHIONESS OF ROU-
cester and Jarrow had been an educated woman she might have been alive today. And so, of course, might the Marquis. But it was not through her lack of education that she was caught. The crime, as a crime, was wholly successful and it was only discovered inadvertently by the Department of Dead Ends. The tragic truth is that if she had known only as much law as the ordinary middle-class woman knows she would never have committed murder.

In spite of the crude melodrama of her life and death—ideal stuff for newspaper headlines in normal circumstances—she never “made the front page.” This was because she was arrested two days after England had gone to war with Germany, with the result that she got about ten lines in two of the London papers.

She married the Marquis on May 5th, 1901, when she was twenty-three. It was a manipulated marriage and the manipulator was her own

mother—an altogether objectionable person who let lodgings at Brighton, and indulged in various other activities with which we need not distress ourselves. But—curiously enough, as we are talking of a murderer—they distressed Molly Webster very much indeed.

The name Webster, by the way, is quite arbitrary, though Molly acquired legal right to it through the fact that she had used it all her life. She did not know who her father was; nor, one is bound to believe, did her mother.

Early in her life something seems to have weaned Molly from the influence of her mother. We need not be mystical about it. At various times the house would tend to fill itself with respectable people. There was an elderly artist, the late Trellawney Samson, who painted Molly when she was a lovely little thing of five. He remained her friend throughout childhood and must have taught her a great deal, though he could not eradicate an unexpected tendency to be much too

careful with small sums of money. Probably from him she derived her love of respectability which later became an obsession.

Presumably through Samson's influence, she was sent to the local High School where for a time she was a model pupil. Except for one mention of her parsimonious tendencies she earned consistently good reports and won three prizes, each for arithmetic. The record of a dull little plodder—until we suddenly find that in her second year in the upper school and actually on her fifteenth birthday she was expelled for striking a mistress.

For three years she tried various jobs, beginning with domestic service. She had a number of situations, leaving each of her own accord, and in each case being given an excellent character. There was a brief period in various shops, including, of all things, an undertaker's.

The next we hear of her is at twenty-two, making fairly regular appearances in provincial music-halls. She was a good-looking girl but not a ravishing beauty, being too tall and bony for her generation. Her photographs are disappointing, though one can detect a certain grace and beauty that must have been appealing. We must infer that her physical lure lay in her vitality, which was considerable. Both before and after marriage she had a number of ardent admirers—none of whom, we may believe, touched her lips.

On the halls she was able to support herself without her mother's assistance and to dress quite reasonably. All those who knew her at this time have agreed that she led a life of almost puritanical respectability. In those days puritanism was not a helpful quality in a comedienne. Her strong line was Cockney characterization, but she never allowed the slightest risquerie in her songs or her patter.

At the end of April 1901 she had an engagement in her home town—at the then newly opened Hippodrome. Here an unknown admirer sent her an elaborate bouquet and, as was her custom, she sent it back.

On the following night, immediately after her turn, the manager brought two men to her dressing-room. One was an elderly man with white hair, bear-leader to the second man, who was thirty-one but behaved as if he were sixteen.

The elder man was a Colonel Boyce. He introduced the younger as "Mr. Stranack." Because there were two of them, one of them white-headed, Molly was reasonably polite.

The next day they turned up at her lodgings in Station Road. The younger man, it appeared, was very smitten and the Colonel was giving him disinterested moral support.

For some reason Molly seems to have made investigations. She found that the names were genuine—as far as they went; that Stranack's full name was Charles Augustus Jean

Marie Stranack and that when he was not paying court to comedienne he was more commonly known as the Marquis of Roucester and Jar-row.

This knowledge seems to have produced in Molly the same kind of violent storm that had changed the smug little pupil into the apache who had smashed her mistress' jaw. We may say that by the same storm the puritan temperament was blown out like a candle. In fact, she went to her mother, whom she had not seen for seven years, and positively asked for a helping hand.

"All right, dearie! I'll help you. You shall have your chance in life no matter what happens to me."

Under instructions Molly separated the young Marquis from the Colonel and enticed him to her mother's house. The details become a trifle coarse, for they were stage-managed by her mother—from the moment when the young man entered the house to the moment when a shabby lawyer was put on to blackmail him.

The Marquis succumbed to threats and nine days later married Molly at the Brighton registrar's office.

After the ceremony Molly came to herself—the rather queer self that she had created out of the half-understood teachings of the artist and her own violent reactions from her mother's mode of life. One imagines her looking round a little vaguely to see where this tempera-

mental leap in the dark had landed her. There was, among other things, her husband.

In the whirl of what we may by courtesy call her engagement, she had had little time to make his acquaintance. She now found that she had tied herself to an amiable, irresponsible, reasonably good-looking young man, with the mental outlook of a schoolboy who has broken bounds. She extracted his history, which was an uninspiring affair. He seemed to be uncertain whether he had any relations but fancied that a man who had been awfully nice to him was his second cousin. He had spent a short time at Oxford and a still shorter time in the Army, after which his father had handed him over to Colonel Boyce.

After his father's death, some nine years previously, the Colonel had taken him, she gathered, first to Paris and Vienna, then to Canada and later to the East, and they had had a perfectly gorgeous time. He had never been to the House of Lords—he even inclined to the belief that it was an Elective Assembly—and but rarely visited the family estate at Roucester in Gloucester.

The Marquis bore curiously little resentment for the means by which he had been married. It is even possible that he regarded the whole thing as the more or less normal procedure; for his conception of sexual morality was, as will presently be seen, elementary. Moreover, under the Colonel's tutelage his social

experience had been almost limited to chance acquaintances in hotels.

Molly let him take her to Paris for the honeymoon, where she made the discovery that her husband was infatuated with her. It is unlikely that she was at all deeply stirred in response; but if she was not, it is quite certain that the Marquis never knew it. To her, marriage was a new job and she did it well. Paradoxical as it may sound, Molly was, in many respects, an excellent wife.

As well as a husband, there was an income of something under three thousand a year—which she was to take in hand a little later. And then, of course, there was the fact that she had changed a very doubtful name for a quite indisputable title. For the first year she was very sensitive about the title. It would be clumsy to say that she was a snob. The title was to her the symbol of her emancipation from the sordid conditions of her birth and childhood and her quite natural pride in it led to an incident on the first day of their honeymoon—which cast, one might say, the shadow of the tragedy of six years later.

They put up at the *Hotel des Anglais* where he astonished and offended her by signing the register as "Mr. and Mrs. Stranack." And in this connection we hear her voice for the first time. One imagines the words being very clearly enunciated (thanks to her training in the halls) while the new consciousness of rank

struggles with the Cockney idiom.

"I felt myself going hot and cold all over, though I didn't say anything until we were in our room. And then I said: 'This is a nice thing, Charles,' I said, 'if you're ashamed of me already. And if you're not, why did you sign Mr. and Mrs. Stranack?' And then he laughed and said: 'Well, you see the fact is that jolly old manager-fellow recognized me and that's how we signed it before. Must be careful, what?' And I said: 'Do you mean to say you've brought me to the very hotel where you've stayed before with some woman? I never knew men treated their wives like that,' I said. And he laughed again and said: 'That's all right, kiddie. She was my wife, too. Married her at the place they call the *Mairie*.'

Molly was taking no risks. She walked out of the room, called an interpreter and made him take her to the *Mairie*. Here she obtained the marriage certificate of Marthe Celeste Stranack, née Frasinier, dated February 15th, 1897—which she did not want. And the death certificate of the same—dated January 22nd, 1901—which enabled her to return to the *Hotel des Anglais* without menace to her technical respectability.

After leaving Paris they went to Bournemouth and spent the summer drifting about English watering-places. In those days Rochester Castle had not been thrown open to the public. It was let until the fol-

lowing September. As soon as the tenancy expired Molly insisted on going to live at the Castle. So there, in the following April (1902) her son was born.

Again it was probably the reaction from her mother that made Molly take her own motherhood with fanatical zeal. It might almost be said that the baby changed the very contours of the countryside. Roucester, which perhaps you know as a noisy little town, was then hardly more than a village. That town was called into being by Molly's discovery that it was impossible to live in the Castle on three thousand a year: The knowledge made her angry and she wanted to hurt somebody, so she hurt Colonel Boyce.

The Colonel had combined with the duty of tutor those of absentee overseer of the estate. He was an honest, stupid man with the class-morality of a Victorian gentleman. After the debacle he returned as guardian of Molly's child and with the boy was killed in an air-raid on London in 1917. Only a few days before his death he gave evidence to the Court of Chancery.

"I was aware that the Marchioness had called in a firm of London accountants to examine my books. And I think I may say, without fear of being accused of malice to the dead, that Lady Roucester was disappointed when no defalcation was discovered. In a subsequent interview she asked me a number of questions, particularly in regard to the

leases. At the end of our conversation I found myself virtually discharged as an incompetent servant. Thereafter, I understand, the Marchioness managed the estate."

She did. Molly, the ex-music-hall hack and unscrupulous adventuress, took over that rambling, difficult estate and in five years was squeezing out of it a trifle under eleven thousand a year net. If you have driven through this part, you may regret the big factory of the Meat Extract people whose coal barges have spoilt that bit of the river, while Cauldean Hill, of course, has been utterly ruined by the quarry. But you should remember in charity that they are the indirect result of Molly's conscientious motherhood.

She even made a partially successful attempt to build up her husband, who had now taken on the tremendous importance of being the father of her son. Even that first year she raised enough to attend the Coronation—dragged along with her the reluctant Marquis, protesting, not without truth, that he looked a most frightful ass in miniver and a coronet. She made him attend some of the debates, but neither threats nor tears would induce him to make a speech: He was an indifferent horseman but she soon had money enough to put him back in the traditional position of M.F.H.

Out of it all she took no more than four hundred a year for herself of which nearly three hundred was spent on dress.

In their third year that handful of prosperous and for the most part idle persons who are commonly called "the County" began to approve of what she had done with the Marquis, and in the fourth year they "called."

Oddly enough, they seem to have liked her. There are no stories of her gaucherie. As she made no secret of her origin and did not claim to be one of them, they willingly gave her the position to which her rank would normally have entitled her.

Her aim was to fulfil her role as adequately as she could in the country. There was no town-house, though she hoped they would be able to afford one by the time Conrad was old enough to go to Eton. Cowes was financially out of reach, so they spent August at the Castle.

It was on an August morning in 1907—actually Bank Holiday—when there came the next crisis in her life. At exactly half-past twelve she went out, as she had a bit of a headache and intended to potter in the garden until lunch time. But she was still on the terrace when she saw the station Victoria coming up the drive.

Disentangling the facts from her own rather verbose account, we gather that she waited on the terrace until the cab was immediately below her. She then called out to the woman sitting in it:

"Hullo! Have you come to see me?"

The woman seemed to be flus-

tered by this informal greeting. She made no answer and let herself be driven on to the entrance. Here she hesitated, then walked along the terrace to where Molly was standing.

"Excuse me asking—but are you Lady Roucester?"

Molly had had a quick look at her and thought she might be an old-time acquaintance of the halls.

"Yes. And I know your face quite well, but since I've had the influenza my memory is something awful."

"Excuse me. But the family name is Stranack, isn't it? Your husband's got a girl's name, hasn't he?—Jean-Marie. Charles Augustus Jean Marie Stranack? And he's called—" she consulted a piece of paper—"the Marquis of Roucester and Jarow. He was born in Roucester and he's thirty-eight."

Tears, Molly said, were running down the woman's cheeks. She took a folded paper out of her purse and gave it to Molly.

"Perhaps you'll look at this and tell me what we'd better do?"

It was, of course, the certificate of marriage between Charles Stranack and Phyllis Margaret, solemnized in St. Seiriol's Church, Toronto, on June 30th, 1900.

Toronto—June 30th, 1900—as against Brighton May 5th, 1901. The two women seem to have stood together for two or three minutes without speaking to each other. They were certainly there at twenty-five minutes to one when the

youthful Lord Narley, heir to the Marquisate, passed within a hundred feet of them with his governess.

"Is that your little boy?" asked Phyllis Margaret. "Of course, it's hard on him but—I really don't know what's to be done, I'm sure."

Very hard on him, thought Molly! He had been known as a young lord who would one day be a marquis. They would laugh at him all his life. For, of course, wherever she went with him it would "get about." Even at Brighton, where she had been nobody, it had "got about" that the name of Webster had been chosen at random. He would just be "Master Conrad"—if anything.

"All right, dearie, I'll help you! You shall have your chance in life no matter what happens to me."

By one o'clock Phyllis Margaret was dead.

Legally, it was a premeditated murder; but humanly speaking the whole thing was planned and carried out on the spur of the moment.

"I suppose we aren't going to fly at each other's throats," said Molly. "We shall have to see Charles about this. He is pottering about after rabbits and won't be in for ever so long, for he's always late for luncheon, but I know where to find him."

The two of them crossed the home-park together. Molly had kept the marriage certificate, which

presently she put in her blouse. On the way their conversation seems to have been confined to an amicable agreement that the Marquis had always been untrustworthy with women, probably always would be.

At a quarter to one they came upon the Marquis in a clearing in the copse. Joseph Ledbetter, a junior keeper, who was with the Marquis, testified to the time. He testified further that as the two ladies approached the Marquis showed signs of an almost ludicrous agitation and that he actually said, "Good lord, Joe! I'm in the soup. You'd better mouch off."

There follows one of those amazing little scenes that positively shock our preconceptions. We are compelled to imagine those two unhappy women turning upon the Marquis and denouncing him for the cruel little cad that he was. We imagine him faltering and cowering. But in fact he merely said:

"Hullo, Phyllis!"

And Phyllis Margaret said:

"Hullo, Charles! I've just had a word with Lady Roucester." (This was very civil of her since she believed the title was justly her own.) "And I saw your little boy, only it was too far off and I couldn't speak to him."

"Ha! Jolly kid, what! Only Molly runs him on a tight rein. I suppose we'd better be mouching back! Must be nearly lunchtime."

Molly took out the certificate and showed it to him.

"I only want to know one thing, Charles. Is that a forgery?"

He just glanced at it, then looked away and she knew it was not a forgery. She folded it and put it back in her blouse.

"Bit awkward, what!" said the Marquis. "I suppose we can fix something?"

But Phyllis Margaret was not very helpful.

"I don't know what we can do, Charles. It seems it's going to be hard on one of us. And it wouldn't surprise me if this lady was to refuse and have you sent to prison."

That told Molly that the woman did not want to fix anything. Of course, there was no need for her to do so, reasoned Molly. She had only to make her claim to be sure of the title and at least a substantial alimony. But the fool ought to have realized this before she came to Rochester.

"That's quite right, Charles! You can't fix anything—you'll have to go to prison—unless I save you." ("All right, dearie, I'll help you!")

Molly grabbed the shot-gun from his hand, wheeled round and shot Phyllis Margaret through the head at a range of about four inches.

("When she fell down dead looking all horrible, Charles was sick. And then I knew that it was no good, and that he couldn't keep his head and tell the tale I'd already thought of. And I thought of Conrad and I didn't love Charles at all, because I think he was a worm. But Conrad takes after me and

I always meant him to have his chance.")

Molly was holding the shot-gun while the Marquis babbled in terror. By checking up on other events we are able to work out that she gave him some seven minutes before she tackled him.

"I'm going to say that she was one of your cast-off loves and when you wouldn't do anything for her she snatched your gun and shot herself. You must remember to tell the same tale. Otherwise we shall both be hanged because they'll say we murdered her together."

"Yes—yes, that's what we'll say! That's a fine idea! Let's go," dithered the Marquis.

("But his teeth were chattering and I was afraid he would run away. So I knew I'd have to do it quickly—or he would let some slut look after Conrad if I were taken.")

"Wait a minute, Charles. We've got to get the tale right before we move from this spot. We've got to rehearse it. You play Phyllis: Go on—take the gun. Put it up as if you were going to shoot yourself. . . . No, you can't do it like that or you won't be able to reach the trigger. . . . You'll have to put your mouth right on the muzzles. Go on—be a man!"

She saw that he could doubtfully reach the trigger. Anyhow, Molly's finger got there first—and virtually blew her husband's head off with the left barrel.

Molly had read all about finger-

prints. She tore a strip of lace from her clothing—in those days they wore a gathered frill tacked inside the skirt-hem—and wiped the gun from muzzle to butt, including both triggers. She put the lace under her blouse beside the marriage certificate (and later washed it herself and wore it again).

Even when the muzzle had been in his mouth the Marquis could barely have reached the triggers. He was wearing a golf suit (precursor of plus-fours). She rolled back the dead man's stocking, unbuckled his leather strap-garter, looped the garter round the trigger, then fastened the buckle. By such a device—by putting his toe in the loop of the garter—a man could blow his own head off with a shotgun.

Then she ran to Ledbetter's cottage, which was nearer than the Castle and in the opposite direction.

"Get on your bicycle at once and go for Dr. Turner and the police. There has been an accident."

"Did you say go for the police, my lady?"

"Dr. Turner and the police, Ledbetter. You'll all have to know soon, so I may as well tell you now. His lordship shot a woman who was blackmailing him and then committed suicide."

She turned back, walked through the copse past the two dead bodies to the Castle, where she summoned the housekeeper and the butler and gave them her version of the affair.

It is an axiom that the greater the

risk taken by a murderer at the moment of murder, the greater are the chances of ultimate escape. Molly had taken an enormous risk at the moment of murder. Young Ledbetter might have hidden himself in the copse to see the fun. About four hundred yards away, part of the copse was being cleared by five laborers and a foreman. It was their dinner hour and any one of them might have passed the spot. It just happened that none of them did so.

There was no suspicion of Molly, partly because there was no perceptible motive. The Coroner, whose daughter Molly had presented at the last Court, confined his comments upon her actions to expressions of sympathy and admiration of her cool-headed courage. The local police toed the line. But the Treasury sent down Detective-Inspector Martleplug to have an unofficial look around.

From a close examination of the scene of the murder Martleplug picked up nothing. There was nothing in the footsteps to upset Molly's story—and very little in the gun itself. Round one trigger was the garter which, in any case, would have blotted out fingerprints. On the other trigger there were no fingerprints—though there ought to have been, if the Marquis had shot Phyllis Margaret before looping the garter round the other trigger and shooting himself. But you couldn't build anything on that.

Martleplug managed to take the

gun back with him to the Yard. Molly neglected to claim it and in course of time it drifted to the Department of Dead Ends.

It was fifteen days before they found out anything about the dead woman. Her underclothing had been marked "Vanlessing" and eventually they found that she had stayed for three weeks in cheap lodgings off the Waterloo Road and had there called herself "Mrs. Stranack." The landlady, whether she knew anything or not, gave no information that was of any use in tracing her late lodger's previous movements.

Molly shut up the Castle for a year and took her boy to the South of France. Early the following summer she spent a few weeks at Brighton. Her mother, whom she did not go to see, died during this visit and Molly created a mild situation by refusing to pay her funeral expenses. Eventually she backed out, and commissioned her former employers, obtaining a special discount. Shortly after Christmas she returned to the Castle.

She now entered upon the third phase of her paradoxical career. Although she was only twenty-nine her hair was beginning to go grey. (To dye one's hair was socially impossible in 1907.) Her dress became severe. But her devotion to her son's future forbade her to become a recluse. She took up archery and became president of the Gloucester Toxophilites.

She was still very close-fisted, ran the estate with a rather brutal econ-

omy and gave perilously little to charity. Nevertheless, she attained a certain popularity. She was willing and eager to open bazaars, to work for hospitals and the like, and once a year she would throw the Castle open to the Waifs and Strays, entertaining them with reasonable liberality. In short, she was systematically training herself for the rôle of *grande dame* which she intended to fill when her son was grown up.

In 1909 she sent the boy to a preparatory school. For a fortnight at the beginning of each term she was moody and even tearful. She disliked and secretly disapproved of boarding-schools as she did of hunting. But she believed both to be necessary for his welfare.

For five years she lived like this and we may assume that, in psychological jargon, she had transmuted the ego that had committed murder. We pick up a blurred record of the period through the news-cutting agencies—paragraphs in local papers about small activities and doubtful little anecdotes. Suddenly the spotlight falls on her again on July 10th, 1914, in the form of a letter from the management of the Hotel Cecil in the Strand (now the headquarters of a petrol organization).

The letter informed her that a Mrs. Vanlessing had contracted a liability of £34-15-0, that she had stated that she was sister "to" the Marchioness of Gloucester and Jarro and, further, that her ladyship

would be only too pleased to pay the account.

Vanlessing! She remembered the name vaguely in connection with Phyllis Margaret. But she remembered too that Scotland Yard had done their best with the gun and the footprints and one thing and another. So she wired back:

"Never had a sister so cannot accept liability—Molly Roucester and Jarrow."

The Vanlessing woman slipped away but was found by Scotland Yard a week later. On arrest she repeated her tale, but tearfully withdrew it when she was shown a photograph of Molly.

"Aw! I'll take the rap," we imagine her saying (for she was a Canadian). "Guess the whole thing was a plant and I've been made a sucker by my own sister. She married a guy called Stranack in Toronto on June 30th, 1900. She claimed she'd found out later—about 1907 it was—that he was an English lord. She was down and out at the time and I lent her the money and gave her the clothes to come over here. Never had a word from her since. So I thought I'd drift over and see if I could collect."

Three weeks later—two days after we had entered the War—Superintendent Tarrant of Dead Ends took a young subordinate named Norris to Roucester Castle. Norris was carrying the shot-gun that had killed the Marquis, not as might be expected in a gun-case but in a

cricket bag. In the train Tarrant opened the cricket-bag and, as Norris described it, started messing about with the gun and the garter that was still looped around one of the triggers.

"We have called, Lady Roucester, about the woman Vanlessing who recently pretended to be your sister. We've caught her."

Molly was rather haughty about it. It was three in the afternoon and she had had them shown into the dining-room (now open to the public on any weekday except Mondays during the summer months between 12 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

"I am not interested," she said. "I never had a sister. I read in the papers that you had caught her. And I don't know why you have come all the way from London to tell me."

"Quite so, Lady Roucester. We know she is not your sister. And I didn't come all the way from London to tell you what you know already. I came all that way, Lady Roucester, to tell you something I think you *don't* know. She is the sister of the woman who was shot on your estate."

To which Molly made the rather unexpected answer: "What do I care?"

"Did you know that the woman who was shot on your estate seven years ago, Lady Roucester, had married your husband in Canada?"

"No." That was what Molly said. But she must have said it very badly, for Tarrant was able to see that she

was lying and this encouraged him.

"Perhaps you would like to look at this marriage certificate?"

Molly looked at it for a long time, racking her brains, no doubt, for something to say—making the uneducated mistake of believing that it was necessary to say something.

"Well, I still don't see that this has got anything to do with me or my son. The woman is dead, isn't she! She's out of it. And I'm here. What's it all about?"

The atmosphere had changed from that of a Marchioness giving audience to a couple of detectives to that of an hereditary harridan giving back-chat to the cops.

"Wait a minute!" said Tarrant. "Do you believe that if a man commits bigamy and the first woman dies the second becomes his legal wife?"

That was, of course, what poor Molly had believed and Tarrant saw it at once and was now sure of his ground.

"What do you mean by 'legal wife'?" she shrilled. "Are you trying to say that I wasn't the legal wife of the Marquis?"

Tarrant, we must suppose, was making the most of the atmosphere, stimulating her deep-rooted instinct to treat him and his kind as natural enemies. It sounds unsporting but you must remember that murder is very unsporting.

"The Marquis seems to have had a weakness for legal wives!" he remarked. "I've got another one here. A Frenchie. Marthe Celeste—"

"She died before he married me. Next, please, as the saying is."

"That's right. But Phyllis Margaret was alive when he married you. Care to look at the dates on these certificates?"

More back-chat from Molly, then Tarrant again:

"We know Phyllis Margaret was alive when he married you. And take it from me that you've got your law all wrong, as your solicitor will tell you if you ask him. If the Marquis married you while he had a legal wife living it doesn't matter whether she's dead now or not. Living or dead, she would be his wife in law—and you wouldn't. In fact, you wouldn't have any right to the title."

There was a sharp cry from Molly and she fell in a faint. The cry of agony was genuine. The faint may have been a fake to gain time.

Tarrant and Norris lifted her on to the long seat in the bow window (you will see the plain oak now, but it was upholstered in those days). Tarrant was standing over her when she opened her eyes.

"You wouldn't have killed them both if you'd known that, would you, Molly?"

"What the hell d'you mean?"
"I'll soon show you what I mean. Norris, give me that gun."

We imagine a little gasp as the gun, with the garter looped round one of the triggers, was held before Molly's eyes.

"You swung it on the coroner that the Marquis looped the garter round

the trigger—then put the two barrels in his mouth—like this—then put his foot in the loop—like this—and blew his own head off.”

“He did—he did I tell you! I saw him.”

“I know you *said* you saw him. Now I’m going to show you something. . . . Open the window, Norris.” He broke the gun, took a single cartridge from his pocket and inserted it. “Now hold the gun, Norris. Point it high. Now—watch this, Molly. Here’s the Marquis putting his foot through the loop. See?”

Tarrant pulled the garter. There came a report as the gun discharged itself harmlessly through the open window. Then Tarrant swung the gun round and held the muzzle of the twin barrels close under the nose of the Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow.

“Keep still—I’m not going to hurt you. Smell those barrels. Which one has just carried the charge? The right barrel! Go on—smell it! Put your finger in and you’ll find it’s warm—and dirty.”

“What’re you doing to me? Take that gun away!”

“The garter fired the *right* barrel,” said Tarrant. “But it was proved by the position of the wound that the Marquis was killed by the *left* barrel.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Then I’ll tell you. You killed that woman yourself. Then by some trick of your own you got the

Marquis to put the barrel in his own mouth as if he were going to shoot himself. But it was you who pressed the trigger and killed him. And *when he was dead*, you wiped the triggers for fingerprints and then you took the garter from the dead man’s leg and *looped it round the wrong trigger*. And then you—”

“Oh, all right! I did it for my kid’s sake—God help me! And now it’s all for nothing. I don’t care what happens to me.”

They arrested her and took her away. And then a rather dreadful little thing happened—while they were charging her.

“Name?” asked the Charge-Sergeant.

“No good asking me,” said Molly. “Ask this gentleman here—he knows all about the law. I was Molly Webster before that dirty little skunk married me.”

“The name is Molly Stranack, Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow,” said Tarrant and then: “I asked you to look at the certificates, Lady Roucester. Perhaps you’d like to look at them now. Date of marriage between Phyllis Margaret and Stranack, the Marquis—June 30th, 1900. *Death of Marthe Celeste Jan. 22nd, 1901.* Marthe being alive at the time, the marriage to Phyllis Margaret was not a marriage at all. She could have prosecuted the Marquis for bigamy. But she couldn’t have shaken your title—or your son’s succession.”

“Then, there was no need to—”

"None whatever—*my lady*," said Tarrant and then Molly burst into tears, probably the first she had shed since babyhood. Tarrant, he said afterwards, could not stand the sight of her grief and bolted back to his office where Norris was waiting for him—a flushed and very nearly indignant young Norris.

"I say, sir! That garter—in the photo of the gun taken at the time. It's looped round the *left* trigger."

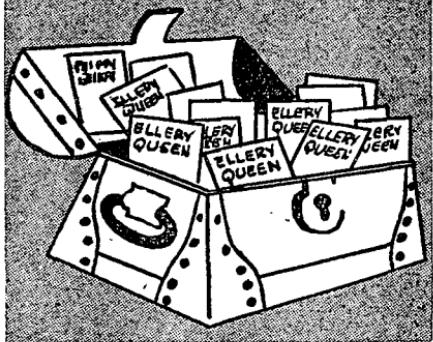
"Is it!" said Tarrant. "Then it must be my fault. I remember unfastening it in the train going down. I must have put it back on the

wrong trigger. Very careless of me, Norris. Always replace things exactly as you find them. But, after all, it doesn't alter the fact that she murdered her husband and that woman. And I'm afraid she'll be hanged."

But here Tarrant was wrong. Molly, the indisputably genuine Marchioness, was also the hereditary *gamine* who knew a trick or two for evading the vigilance of the cops. She had smuggled in a phial of medicinal tablets, harmless enough if taken one at a time but fatal if swallowed *en masse*.



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When a Man Murders

Seemingly no Ellery Queen paperback anthology is complete without a short novel by Rex Stout. So be it!—and we hope it continues that way a long time! For Rex Stout is usually at his very best in the short novels about the beer-drinking, orchid-growing epicurean with the razor-edged mind—Nero Wolfe—and his front-man, buffer, glorified errand boy, the breezy, slangy Archie Goodwin, who blocks and runs interference like the All-American he is . . . and again, cheers!

THAT'S JUST IT," SHE DECLARED, struggling to keep her voice steady. "We're not actually married." My brows went up. Many times, seated there at my desk in Nero Wolfe's office, I've eyed a female visitor to estimate how many sound reasons she might offer why a wedding ring would be a good buy. But usually I don't bother with those who are already hitched. So my survey of this specimen was purely professional, especially since her husband was along. Now, however, I changed focus. She would unquestionably grade high, after allowing for the crease in her forehead, the redness around her eyes, and the tension of her jaw muscles, tightening her lips. Making such allowances was nothing new for me, since most of the callers at that office are in trouble, seldom trivial.

Wolfe, who had just come down from the plant rooms on the roof and settled his impressive bulk in

the oversized chair behind his desk, glared at her. "But you told Mr. Goodwin—" he began, stopped, and turned to me: "Archie?"

I nodded. "Yes, sir. A man on the phone said his name was Paul Aubry, and he and his wife wanted to see you as soon as possible, and I told him 6 o'clock. I didn't tell him to bring their marriage certificate."

"We have one," she said, "but it's no good." She twisted her head around and up. "Tell him, Paul."

She was in the red-leather chair near the end of Wolfe's desk. It's a roomy one, with big arms, and Paul Aubry was perched on one of them, with an arm extended across the back. I had offered him one of the yellow chairs, which are perfectly adequate, but apparently he preferred to stick closer to his wife.

"It's a real mess!" he blurted.

He wasn't red-eyed, but there was evidence that he was sharing the trouble. His hand on top of the chair

back tightened into a fist. His fairly well-arranged face was grim, and his broad shoulders seemed to be hunched in readiness to meet an attack. He bent his head to meet her look.

"Don't you want to tell him?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, you." She put out a hand to touch his knee and then jerked it away.

His eyes went to Wolfe. "We were married six months ago—six months and four days—but now we're not married, according to the law. We're not married, because my wife—Caroline—" He paused to look at her, and, his train of thought interrupted, reached to take her hand. But it moved, and he didn't get it.

He stood up, squared his shoulders, faced Wolfe, and spoke faster and louder: "Four years ago she married a man named Sidney Karnow. A year later he enlisted in the Army and was sent to Korea. A few months after that she was officially informed that he was dead—killed in action. A year later I met her, and we fell in love. I asked her to marry me, but she wouldn't until two years had passed since Karnow died, and then she did. Three weeks ago he turned up alive—he phoned his lawyer here from San Francisco—and last week he got his army discharge, and Sunday, day before yesterday, he came to New York."

Aubry hunched his shoulders, like Jack Dempsey ready to move in. "I'm not giving her up," he told

the world. "I—will—not—give—her—up!"

Wolfe grunted. "It's fifteen million to one, Mr. Aubry."

"What do you mean, fifteen million?"

"The People of the State of New York. They're lined up against you, officially at least. I'm one of them. Why in heaven's name did you come to me? You should have cleared out with her days ago—Turkey, Australia, Burma, anywhere—if she was willing. It may not be too late if you hurry. *Bon voyage.*"

Aubry stood a moment, took a deep breath, turned, and went to the yellow chair I had placed, and sat. Becoming aware that his fists were clenched, he opened them, cupped his hands on his knees, and looked at Caroline. He lifted a hand and let it fall back to his knees. "I can't touch you," he said.

"No," she said. "Not while—no."

"Okay, you tell him. He might think I was bulling it. You tell him."

She shook her head. "He can ask me. I'm right here. Go ahead."

He turned to Wolfe: "It's like this. Karnow was an only child, and his parents are both dead. He inherited a pile, nearly two million dollars. He left a will giving half of it to my—to Caroline, and the other half to some relatives, an aunt and a couple of cousins. His lawyer had the will. After notice of his death came, it took several months to get the will probated and the estate distributed, on account of special

formalities in a case like that. Caroline's share was a little over nine hundred thousand dollars, and when I met her she had it and was living on the income. All I had was a job selling cars, making around a hundred and fifty a week. But it was her I fell in love with, not the million, just for your information. When we got married it was her idea that I ought to buy an agency, but I'm not saying I fought it. I shopped around, and we bought a good one at a bargain, and—"

"What kind of agency?"

"Automobile." Aubry's tone implied that no other kind of agency was worth mentioning. "Brandon and Hiawatha. It took nearly half of Caroline's capital to swing it, but in the past three months we've cleared over twenty thousand after taxes, and the future was looking rosy—when this happened. I was planning to—but that's out now, I guess. This proposition we want to offer Karnow, it's not my idea and it's not Caroline's. It's ours. It just came out of all our talking and talking after we heard Karnow was alive. Last week we went to Karnow's lawyer, Jim Beebe, to get him to propose it to Karnow, but we couldn't persuade him. He said he knew Karnow too well—he was in college with him—and he knew Karnow wouldn't even listen to it. So we decided—"

"What was the proposal?"

"We thought it was a fair offer. We offered to turn it all over to

him, the half-million Caroline has left and the agency, the whole works, if he would consent to a divorce. Also, I would continue to run the agency if he wanted to hire me. Also, Caroline would ask for no settlement and no alimony."

"It was my idea," she said.

"It was ours," he insisted.

Wolfe was frowning at them. My brows were up again. Evidently he really was in love with her and not with the dough, and I'm all for true love up to a point. As for her, my attitude flopped back to the purely professional. Granting that she was set to ditch her lawful husband, if she felt that this guy was worth a million bucks to her it would have taken too much time and energy to try to talk her out of it. Cocking an eye at his earnest face, which was passable but no pin-up, I would have said she was overpricing him. He went on:

"So, when Beebe wouldn't do it and we learned that Karnow had come to New York, we decided I'd better see him myself and put it up to him. We only decided that last night. I had some business appointments this morning, and this afternoon I went to his hotel—he's at the Churchill—and went up to his room. I didn't phone ahead, because I've never seen him, and I wanted to see him before I spoke with him. I wanted a look at him."

Aubry stopped to rub a palm across his forehead, pressing hard. When his hand dropped to his

thigh, it became a fist again. He looked up and his brow wrinkled.

"One trouble," he said, "was that I wasn't absolutely sure what I was going to say. The main proposition, that was all right, but there were two other things in my mind. The agency is incorporated, and half of the stock is in Caroline's name and half in mine. Well, I could tell him that if he didn't take the offer I would hang onto my half and fight for it, but I hadn't decided whether to or not. The other thing, I could tell him that Caroline is pregnant. It wouldn't have been true, and I guess I wouldn't have said it, but it was in my mind. Anyhow it doesn't matter, because I didn't see him."

He clamped his jaw and then relaxed it. "This is where I didn't shine—I admit that—but it wasn't just cold feet. I went up to his room without phoning, and I lifted my hand to knock on the door, but I didn't because I was trembling. I was trembling all over. I stood there a while to calm down, but I didn't calm. I realized that if I went in there and put it to him and he said nothing doing, there was no telling what might happen. The way I was feeling, I was a lot more apt to queer it than help it. So I just ducked it. I'm not proud of it, but I'm telling you, I gave it a try and came away. Caroline was waiting for me downstairs, and I went and told her. That wasn't easy, either, telling her I had muffed it. Up to then she thought I could handle about any-

thing that came along. She thought I was good."

"I still do, Paul," she told him.

"Yeah? I can't touch you."

"Not now. Not until—" Her hand fluttered. "Don't keep saying that."

"Okay, we'll skip it." He turned back to Wolfe: "So I told her the man-to-man approach was a bum idea, and we sat and chewed at it. We decided that none of our friends was up to it. The lawyer I use for the agency couldn't handle it. When one of us thought of you, I forgot which, it clicked with both of us, and I went to a booth to phone for an appointment. Maybe you can get him down here and make the proposition yourself or, if he won't come, you can send Archie Goodwin to see him. Caroline has the idea it might be better to send Goodwin, because Karnow's thin-skinned and you might irritate him. We'll leave that to you. I wish I could say you can write your own ticket if he takes our offer. But if he does, we won't be any too flush, so I have to mention it. Five thousand dollars, something like that—we could manage that all right. But we've got to get it cleaned up—now, today, tonight!"

Wolfe cleared his throat. "I'm not a lawyer. Mr. Aubry; I'm a detective."

"I know that, but what's the difference? You have a reputation for getting things out of people. We want you to detect a way of getting Karnow to accept our proposition."

Wolfe grunted. "I could challenge your diction, but you're in no mood to debate semantics. And my fees are based on the kind and amount of work done. Your job seems fairly simple. In describing it to me, how candid have you been?"

"Completely. Absolutely."

"Nonsense. Complete candor is beyond the reach of man or woman. If Mr. Karnow accepts your proposal, can I rely on you to adhere to its terms?"

"We'll stick to it."

Wolfe's head turned. "Mrs. Karnow, are you—?"

"She's not Mrs. Karnow!" Aubry barked. "She's my wife!"

Wolfe's shoulders went up half an inch and dropped back. "Madam, are you sure you understand the proposal and will faithfully adhere to it?"

"Yes," she said firmly.

"You know that you will be relinquishing a dower right, a legal right, in a large property?"

"Yes."

"Then I must ask you a few questions about Mr. Karnow. You had no child by him?"

"No."

"You were in love when you married, presumably?"

"We thought—I guess we were. Yes."

"Did it cool off?"

"Not exactly." She hesitated, deciding how to put it. "Sidney was sensitive and high-strung—You see, I still say 'was' because for so long

I've thought he was dead. I was only nineteen when we married, and I suppose I didn't know how to take him. He enlisted in the Army because he thought he should do his share of peeling potatoes—that was how he put it—but I didn't agree with him. But I knew by then that what I thought wasn't very important, nor what I felt, either. If you're going to try to get him to agree to this, of course you'll want to know what he's like. But I don't really know, myself, not after all this time. Maybe it would help for you to read the letters I got from him after he enlisted. He only sent me three, one from Camp Givens and two from Korea—he didn't like writing letters. My husb—Paul said I should bring them along to show you."

She opened her bag, fished in it, and produced some sheets of paper clipped together. I took them to Wolfe. I planted myself at his elbow and read the first one with him.

*Dear Carrie, my true and loving mate
I hope:*

Pardon me, but my weakness is showing. I would like to be where you are this minute and tell you why I didn't like your new dress, and you would go and put on another one, and we would go to the Bramford and eat snails and drink Richebourg, and then go to the Velvet Yoke and eat lady-fingers and drink tomato soup, and then we would go home and take hot baths and go to sleep on fine linen

heets spread over mattresses three feet thick, covered with an electric blanket. After several days of that I would begin to recognize myself and would put my arms around you and we would drown in delight.

Now I suppose I should tell you enough about this place to make you understand why I would rather be somewhere else, but that would be too easy to bother with, and anyway, as you well know, I hate to write, and specially I hate to try to write what I feel. Since the time is getting closer and closer when I'll be at the front and have to kill somebody, I've been going through my memory for things about death. Montaigne said, "The deadliest deaths are the best." I'll quote that to the man I'm going to kill and then he won't mind so much.

Speaking of death, if I don't come back, something I did before I left New York will give you quite a shock. I wish I could be around to see how you take it. You claim you have never worried about money, that it's not worth it. You've also told me that I always talk sardonic, but haven't got it in me to act sardonic. This will show you. I'll admit I have to die to get the last laugh, but that will be sardonic, too. I wonder do I love you or hate you? These emotions are hard to tell apart. Remember me in thy dreams.

Your sardonic
Kavalier Karnow

I went to my desk to put the letters under a paperweight. Caroline spoke:

"I wrote him two long letters every week. I must have sent him over fifty letters, and he never mentioned them the few times he wrote. I want to try to be fair to him, but he always said he was egocentric, and I guess he was."

"Not *was*," Aubry said grimly. "Is—He *is*." He asked Wolfe, "Doesn't that letter prove he's a nut?"

"He is—uh—picturesque," Wolfe conceded. He turned to Caroline: "What had he done before he left New York that—upon his death—gave you quite a shock?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Naturally, I thought he had changed his will and left me out. After word came that he was dead I showed that letter to the lawyer, Jim Beebe, and told him what I thought, and he said it did sound like it, but there had been no change made in the will as far as he knew, and Sidney must have been stringing me."

"Not too adroitly," Wolfe objected. "It isn't so simple to disinherit a wife. However, since he didn't try . . . what do you know about the false report of his death?"

"Only a little from an item in the paper," she said, "but Jim Beebe told me more. Sidney was left for dead in the field in a retreat, but actually he was only stunned, and he was taken prisoner. He was a prisoner for nearly two years, and then he escaped, worked his way northward to the Yalu River, and

crossed into Manchuria. By that time he could talk Chinese—he was wonderful with languages—and he made friends in a village and wore their clothes. What did you call him—picturesque? Maybe he was. Anyhow, a few months after the truce was signed and the fighting stopped he finally decided he had had enough of it, and went back across the Yalu and made his way to South Korea, where he reported to an army post, and they sent him home. And now he's here." She stretched her hands out. "Please, Mr. Wolfe. Please help us."

Though of course she didn't know it, that was bad tactics. Wolfe's reaction to an emotional appeal from a man is rarely favorable, and from a woman, never. He turned away from the painful sight.

"Archie. Are you willing to tackle this job?"

He was being polite. What he really meant was, "Five grand will pay a lot of salaries, including yours, and you will please proceed to earn it for me."

"I deeply appreciate it," I assured him. "If I say no, I won't hear the last of it for months, so I'll take a shot at it."

"Very well. We'll discuss it after dinner, and in the morning you can—"

They drowned him out, both of them cutting in to protest. They couldn't wait until tomorrow; they had to know. They protested to him and then appealed to me. Why put it

off? Why not now? I don't react to emotional appeals the way Wolfe does, and I calmed them down by agreeing with them.

"Very well," Wolfe acquiesced, which was noble of him. "But you must have with you the proposal in writing, in duplicate, signed by Mr. Aubry and—uh—you, madam. You must sign it as Caroline Karnow. . . . Archie, at the bottom, on the left, type the word 'Accepted' and a colon. Under the circumstances, he would be a nincompoop not to sign it, but it would probably be imprudent to tell him so. Your notebook, please?"

I swiveled and got it from the drawer.

I rapped with my knuckles, smartly but not aggressively, on the door of Room 2318 on the twenty-third floor of the Hotel Churchill.

The clients had wanted to camp in Wolfe's office to await word from me, but I had insisted they be as near at hand as possible in case something developed. I left them downstairs in the hotel grill, hoping they'd grab a bite to eat. People in serious trouble have a tendency to eat too little or drink too much, or both.

I knocked again, louder and longer.

On the way in the taxi I had collected a little more information about Sidney Karnow, at least as he had been three years back. His attitude toward money had been

somewhat superior, but he had shown no inclination to scatter his pile around regardless. So far as Caroline knew, he hadn't scattered it at all. He had been more than decent about meeting her modest requirements, and even anticipating them. That gave me no lead, but other details did. The key words were "egocentric," which was bad, and "proud," which was good. If he really had pride and wasn't just using it as a cover for something that wouldn't stand daylight, fine. No proud man would want to eat his breakfasts with a woman who was eager to cough up nearly a million bucks for the privilege of eating them with another guy. That, I had decided, was the tack to take.

Evidently the sizing up would be delayed, since my knocking got no response. Not wanting to risk a picturesque refusal to make an appointment, I hadn't phoned ahead. So I decided to go down and tell the clients that patience would be required for ten minutes or ten hours, take on a sandwich and a glass of milk, and then come up for another try. But before I turned away, my hand went automatically to the knob for a twist and a push, and the door opened. I stood a second, then pushed it a foot farther, stuck my head in, and called:

"Mr. Karnow! Karnow!"

No answer. I swung the door open and stepped inside. Beyond the light I was letting in was darkness, and I would probably have backed out

and shut the door and beat it if I hadn't had such a good nose. When it told me there was a faint odor that I should recognize, and a couple of sniffs confirmed it, I found the wall switch and flipped it, and moved on in. A man was there, spread-eagled on the floor near an open door, flat on his back, a circle of blood near his head.

I took a step toward him—that was involuntary—then wheeled, closed the door to the hall, and returned. From the description Caroline had given me, it was Sidney Karnow. He was dressed, but without a jacket or tie. I squatted and slipped a hand inside his shirt and held my breath; nothing doing. I lifted his eyelid; it came stiffly and didn't want to go back. Actually, the temperature of the skin of his chest had told me what I wanted to know.

I stood up and looked down at him. It was unquestionably Karnow. I looked at my wrist watch and saw 7:22. Through the open door beyond him I could see the glitter of bathroom tiles and fittings, and, detouring around his outstretched arm, I went and squatted again for a close-up of two objects on the floor. One was a GI side arm, a .45, I didn't touch it. The other was a small pillow, and I knew, from a scorched hole and powder black, that it had been used to muffle the gun. I got erect and shut my eyes to think. It is my habit, long established, when I open doors where I haven't been

invited, to avoid touching the knob with my fingertips. Had I followed it this time? I decided yes. Also, had I flipped the light switch with my knuckle? Again yes. Had I made prints anywhere else? No.

I crossed to the light switch and used my knuckle again, got out my handkerchief to open the door and pull it shut after me, took an elevator down to the lobby floor, found a phone booth and dialed a number. The voice that answered belonged to Fritz, the chef and housekeeper whose pay matches mine, and I admit he earns it. I asked for Wolfe.

Fritz was shocked. "But, Archie, he's at dinner!"

"Yeah, I know. Tell him I've been trapped by cannibals and they're slicing me, and step on it."

A full two minutes later Wolfe's outraged voice came: "Well, Archie?"

"No, sir. Not well, I'm calling from a booth in the Churchill lobby. I left the clients in the grill, went up to Karnow's room, found the door unlocked, and entered. Karnow was on the floor, dead, shot with an army gun. The gun's there, but it wasn't suicide. The gun was muffled with a pillow. How do I earn the five grand now?"

"Confound it, Archie, in the middle of a meal."

If you think that was put on, you're wrong. I know that fat genius. That was how he felt, and he said it, that's all.

I ignored it. "I left nothing in the

room," I told him, "and I didn't have an audience, so we're fancy free. I know it's hard to talk with your mouth full, but—"

"Shut up." Silence for four seconds, then, "Did he die within the past ninety minutes?"

"No. The skin on his chest has started to cool off."

"Did you see anything suggestive?"

"No. I was in there maybe three minutes. I wanted to interrupt your dinner. I can go back and give it a whirl."

"Don't." He was curt. "There's nothing to be gained by deferring the discovery. I'll have Fritz notify the police anonymously. Bring Mr. Aubry and Mrs. Karnow. Have they eaten?"

"They may be eating now. I told them to."

"See that they eat, and then bring them here on a pretext—devise one."

"Don't tell them?"

"No. I'll tell them. Have them here in an hour and ten minutes, no sooner. I have barely started my dinner, and now this."

He hung up.

Crossing the lobby and proceeding along one of the long, wide, and luxurious corridors, near the entrance to the grill I was stopped by an old acquaintance, Tim Evarts, the first assistant house dick, only they don't call him that, of the Churchill. He wanted to chin, but I eased him off. If he had known

that I had just found a corpse in one of his rooms and forgot to mention it, he wouldn't have been so chummy.

The big room was only half filled with customers at that hour. The clients were at a corner table and, as I approached, Aubry got up to grab a chair for me. I gave them both a mark for good conduct. Presumably they were on the edge of their seats to hear what Karnow had said, but they didn't yap or claw at me. When I was seated, I spoke:

"No answer to my knock. I'll have to try again. Meanwhile, let's eat."

Their disappointment was nothing but plain, wholesome disappointment.

"I can't eat now," Mrs. Karnow said wearily.

"I strongly advise it," I told her. "How about something light, like a piece of melon and a sturgeon sandwich? We can get that here. Then I'll try again, and if there's still no answer we'll see. You can't stick around here all night."

"He might show up any minute," Aubry suggested. "Or he might come in and leave again. Wouldn't it be better if you stayed up there?"

"Not on an empty stomach." I was firm. "And I'll bet Mrs.—What do I call you?"

"Oh, call me Caroline."

"I'll bet you haven't eaten for a week. You'd better refuel."

That was a tough half-hour. She did eat a little, and Aubry cleaned

up a turkey sandwich and a hunk of cheese, but she was having a hard time to keep from showing that she thought I was a cold-blooded pig. Aubry, as the minutes went by, left no doubt of his attitude. It was pretty gloomy. I downed my coffee and told them to sit tight, got up, and went out and down the corridor to the men's room, locked myself in a cubicle against the chance that Aubry might appear, and stayed there a quarter of an hour. Then I returned to the bar, went to their table and told them, "No answer. I phoned Mr. Wolfe. He has an idea, and wants to see us right away. Let's go."

"What for?" Aubry demanded.

"Look," I said; "when Mr. Wolfe has an idea and wants me to hear it, I oblige him. So I'm going. You can stay here and soak in agony, or you can come along. Take your pick."

From their expressions it was a good guess that they were beginning to think that Wolfe was a phony and I was a slob, but since their only alternative was to call the deal off and start hunting another salesman for their line, they had to string along. After Aubry paid the check we left, and in the corridor I steered them to the left and around to an exit on a side street, to avoid the main lobby. By that time some city employees had certainly responded to Fritz's anonymous phone call to headquarters, and, from some remarks the Aubrys had made, I felt sure that they were known at the

Churchill. The doorman who waved up a taxi for us called them by name.

At the old brownstone house on West 35th Street where Wolfe sleeps, eats, plays with his orchids, and works when he has to, I let us in with my key, and, closing the door, shot the chain bolt. As I escorted them down the hall to the office, a glance at my wrist told me it was 8:35, so I hadn't quite stretched it to the hour and ten minutes Wolfe had specified, but it was pretty close. He emerged from the door to the dining room, which is across the hall from the office, stood there while we filed in, and then followed, the look on his face as black as the coffee he had just been sipping. Crossing to his desk and lowering his overwhelming bulk into his chair, he growled at them:

"Sit down, please."

They stayed on their feet. Aubry demanded, "What's the big idea? Goodwin says you have one."

"You will please sit down," Wolfe said coldly. "I look at people I'm talking to, especially when I suspect them of trying to flummox me, and my neck is not elastic."

His tone made it evident that what was biting him was nothing trivial. Caroline sidled to the red-leather chair and sat on its edge. Aubry plumped on the yellow one and met Wolfe's level gaze.

"You suspect?" he asked quietly. "Who? Of what?"

"I think one of you has seen and

talked with Mr. Karnow. Today. Perhaps both of you."

"What makes you think so?"

"I reserve that. Whether and when I disclose it depends on you. While complete candor is too much to expect, it should at least be approximated when you're briefing a man for a job you want done. When and where did you see Mr. Karnow, and what was said?"

"I didn't. I have never seen him. I told you that. What's the idea of this?"

Wolfe's head moved. "Then it was you, madam?"

Caroline was staring at him, her brow creased. "Are you suggesting that I saw my—that I saw Sidney Karnow today?"

"Precisely."

"Well, I didn't! I haven't seen him at all! And I want to know why you're suggesting that!"

"You will." Wolfe leaned forward and gave her his straightest and hardest look. She met it. He turned his head to the right and aimed the look at Aubry, who stared back.

The doorbell rang.

Fritz was in the kitchen doing the dishes, so I got up and went to the hall, flipped the switch of the light out on the stoop, and took a look through the one-way glass panel of the front door. What I saw deserved admiration. Sergeant Purley Stebbins of Manhattan Homicide West knew that the panel was one-way glass and he was visible, but he wasn't striking a pose. He just stood

there, his big, broad pan a foot away from the glass, to him opaque, a dick doing his duty. I went and opened the door and spoke through the two-inch crack, which was all the chain bolt would allow:

"Hello, there. It wasn't me, honest."

"Okay, comic." His deep bass was a little hoarse as usual. "Then I won't take you. Let me in."

"For what?"

"I'll tell you. Do you expect me to talk through this crack?"

"Yes. If I let you in you'll tramp right over me to bust in on Mr. Wolfe, and he's in a bad humor. So am I. I can spare you ten seconds to loosen up. One, two, three, four—"

He cut me off: "You were just up at the Hotel Churchill. You left there about half an hour ago with a man named Paul Aubry and his wife, and got into a taxi with them. Where are they? Did you bring them here?"

"May I call you Purley?" I asked.
"Cut the clowning."

"All right, then I won't. After all these years you oughta know better. Eighty-seven and four-tenths per cent of the people, including licensed detectives, who are asked impertinent questions by cops, answer quick because they are either scared, or ignorant of their rights, or anxious to cooperate. That lets me out. Give me one reason why I should tell you anything about my movements or any companions I may have had, and make it good."

Silence. After a moment I added, "And don't try to avoid giving me a shock. Since you're homicide, someone is dead. Who?"

"Who do you think?"

"Huh-uh. I won't guess, because I might hit the right number and I'd be in the soup."

"I want to be around when you are. Sidney Karnow was killed in his room at the Churchill this afternoon. He was reported dead in Korea and had just turned up alive, and learned that his wife had married Paul Aubry. As if I'm telling you anything you don't know."

He couldn't see my face through the crack, so I didn't have to bother about managing it. I asked, "Karnow is murdered?"

"That's the idea. He was shot in the back of the head."

"Are you saying I knew about it?"

"Not so far. But you knew about the situation, since you were there with Aubry and the woman. I want 'em, and I want 'em now. Are they here? If not, where are they?"

"I see," I said judiciously. "I admit you have given me a reason. Be seated while I go take a look." I pushed the door shut, went back to the office and crossed to my desk, took a pencil and my memo pad, and wrote:

Stebbins. Says K. murdered. We were seen leaving hotel. Asks are they here and if not where.

I got up to hand it to Wolfe, and he took it in with a glance and slipped it into the top drawer of his

desk. He looked at Caroline and then at Aubry. "You don't need me," he told them. "Your problem has been solved for you. Mr. Karnow is dead."

They gawked at him.

"Of course," he added, "you now have another problem which may be even thornier."

Caroline was stiff, frozen.

"I don't believe it," Aubry said harshly.

"It seems authentic," Wolfe declared. "Archie?"

"Yes, sir. Sergeant Stebbins of Homicide is out on the stoop. He says Karnow was murdered, shot in the back of the head, this afternoon in his room at the Churchill. Mr. Aubry and Mrs. Karnow were seen leaving the hotel with me, and he wants to know if they're here and, if not, where? He says he wants them."

"Good grief!" Aubry said.

Caroline had let out a gasp, but no word. She was still rigid. Her lips moved, and I thought she asked, "He's dead?" But it was too low to be sure.

Wolfe spoke: "So you have another problem. The police will give you a night of it, and possibly a week or a month. Mr. Stebbins cannot enter this house without a search warrant, and if you were my clients, I wouldn't mind letting him wait on the stoop while we considered the matter. But since the job you gave me is no longer feasible, I am no longer in your hire. I have

on occasion welcomed an opportunity to plague the police, but never merely for pastime, so I must bid you good evening."

Caroline left her chair and went to Aubry with her hands out, and he took them and pulled her close.

"However," Wolfe continued, "I have a deep repugnance to letting the police take from my house people who have not been formally charged with a crime. There is a back way out, and Mr. Goodwin will take you by it if you feel that you would like a little time to discuss matters."

"No," Aubry said. "We have nothing to run from. Let him in."

Wolfe shook his head. "Not in my house, to drag you out. You're sure you don't want to delay it?"

"Yes."

"Archie, will you please handle it?"

I arose, told them, "This way, please," and headed for the door, but stopped and turned when I heard Caroline find her voice behind me.

"Wait a minute," she said, barely loud enough for me to get it. She was standing facing Aubry, gripping his lapels. "Paul, don't you think—? Shouldn't we ask Mr. Wolfe—?"

"There's nothing to ask him." Aubry was up, with an arm across her shoulders. "I've had enough of Wolfe. Come on, honey. We don't have to ask anybody anything."

They followed me into the hall. As Aubry was getting his hat from

the rack I opened the door, leaving the chain bolt on, and spoke to Purley:

"What do you know? They were right here in the office. That's a break for you. Now, if—"

"Open the door!"

"In a moment. Mr. Wolfe is peevish and might irritate you, so if you'll remove yourself, on down to the sidewalk, I'll let them out and they are yours."

"I'm coming in."

"No. Don't even think of it."

"I want you, too."

"Yeah, I thought so. I'll be along shortly. Twentieth Street?"

"Now. With me."

"Again, no. I have to ask Mr. Wolfe if there's anything we wouldn't want to bother you with, and, if so, what. Where do I go, Twentieth Street?"

"Yes, and not tomorrow."

"Glad to oblige. The subjects are here at my elbow, so just descend the steps—and be careful, don't fall."

He muttered something I didn't catch, turned, and started down. When he was at the bottom of the seven steps, I removed the bolt, swung the door open, and turned to our former clients.

"Okay. In return for the sandwiches and coffee, here's a suggestion. Don't answer any questions until you've got a lawyer and talked with him. Even if—"

I stopped because my audience was going. Aubry had Caroline's

arm as they crossed the stoop and started down. Not wishing to give Purley the pleasure of having me watch him take them, I shut the door, replaced the bolt, and returned to the office. Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed.

"I'm wanted," I said. "Do I go?"

"Of course," he growled.

"Are we saving anything?"

"No. There's nothing to save."

"The letters from Karnow to his wife are in my desk. Do I take them along?"

"No. They are her property and doubtless she will claim them."

"Did I discover the body?"

"Certainly not. To what purpose?"

"None. Don't worry if I'm late."

I went to the hall for my hat and beat it.

Since I wasn't itching to oblige Homicide, and it was a pleasant evening for a walk, I decided to hoof the fifteen blocks to Twentieth Street, and also to do a little chore on the way. If I'd done it in the office, Wolfe would have pulled his dignity on me and pretended to be outraged, though he knew as well as I did that it's always desirable to get your name in the paper, provided it's not in the obituary column. So I stopped at a phone booth in a drugstore on Tenth Avenue, dialed the *Gazette* number, asked for Lon Cohen, and got him.

"Scrap the front page," I told him, "and start over. If you don't

want it, I'll sell it elsewhere. Did you happen to know that Paul Aubry and his wife, Mrs. Sidney Karnow to you, called on Nero Wolfe this afternoon, and I went somewhere with them, and brought them back to Mr. Wolfe's office, and fifteen minutes ago Sergeant Purley Stebbins came and got them? Or maybe you don't even know that Karnow was murd—"

"Yeah, I know that. What's the rest of it? Molasses you licked off your fingers?"

"Nope. Guaranteed straight as delivered. I just want to get my employer's name in the paper. Mine is spelled A, R, C, H—"

"I know that, too. Who else has this?"

"From me, nobody. Only you, son."

"What did they want Wolfe to do?"

Of course, that was to be expected. Give a newspaperman an inch and he wants a column. I finally convinced him that this was all for now and resumed my way downtown.

At Manhattan Homicide West on Twentieth Street I was hoping to be assigned to Lieutenant Rowcliff so I could try once more to make him mad enough to stutter, but I got a college graduate named Eisenstadt, who presented no challenge. All he wanted was facts, and I dished them out, withholding, naturally, that I had entered the room. It took less than an hour, including having my

statement typed and signed. I declined his pressing invitation to stick around until Inspector Cramer got in. I told him another fact—that I was a citizen in good standing, or fair at least, with a known address, and could be found if and when needed.

Back at the office, Wolfe was yawning at a book. The yawn was an act. He wanted to make it clear to me that losing a fee of five grand was nothing to get riled about. I had a choice: either proceed to rile him, or go to bed. They were equally attractive, and I flipped a quarter and caught it. He didn't ask me what I was deciding because he thought I wanted him to. It was heads, and I told him my session at Homicide wasn't worth reporting, said good night, and mounted the two flights to my room.

In the morning, at breakfast, in the kitchen with Fritz supplying me with hot griddlecakes and the paper propped in front of me, I saw I had given Lon Cohen not one inch, but two. He had stretched it because it was exclusive. Aside from that, there was a pile of miscellaneous information about Karnow's Aunt Margaret, who was Mrs. Raymond Savage, her son Richard, and her daughter Ann, now married to one Norman Horne. There was a picture of Ann, and a not very good one of Caroline.

I seldom see Wolfe in the morning until eleven, when he comes down

from the plant rooms, and that morning I didn't see him at all. A little after ten a call came from Sergeant Stebbins inviting me to drop in at the District Attorney's office at my earliest inconvenience. I don't apologize for taking only four minutes to put weights on papers on my desk, phone up to Wolfe, and get my hat and go, because there was a chance of running into our former clients, and they might possibly be coming to the conclusion that they hadn't had enough of Wolfe; after all.

I needn't have been in such a hurry. I sat for nearly half an hour on a hard wooden chair in the anteroom. I was about ready to go over to the window and tell the switchboard operator that another three minutes was all I could spare, when another female appeared. The way she moved was worthy of study, her face invited a full analysis, her clothes deserved a complete inventory, and either her name was Ann Savage Horne or the *Gazette* had run the wrong picture.

She saw me taking her in and reciprocated frankly, her head cocked a little to one side. She walked over and sat on a chair near mine, and gave me the kind of straight look that you expect only from a queen or a trollop.

"What's that stole?" I asked her. "Rabbit?"

She smiled to dazzle me and darned near made it. "Where did you get the idea," she asked back,

"that vulgarity is the best policy?"

"It's not policy; I was born vulgar. When I saw your picture in the paper I wondered what your voice was like, and I wanted to hear it. Talk some more."

"Oh. You're one up on me."

"I don't mind squaring it. I'm called Goodwin—Archie Goodwin."

"Goodwin?" She frowned a little. She brightened. "Of course! You're in the paper, too—if you're that one. You work for Nero Wolfe?"

"I practically *am* Nero Wolfe, when it comes to work. Where were you yesterday afternoon from eleven minutes past two until eighteen minutes to six?"

"Let's see. I was walking in the park with my pet flamingo. If you think that's no alibi, you're wrong. My flamingo can talk. Ask me some more."

"Can your flamingo tell time?"

"Certainly. It wears a wrist watch on its neck."

"How can it see it?"

She nodded. "I knew you'd ask that. It has been trained to tie its neck in a knot, just a plain single knot, and when it does that the watch is on a bend, so that—Well, Mother?" She was suddenly out of her chair and moving. "What, no handcuffs on anybody?"

Her mother, Sidney Karnow's Aunt Margaret, emerged from the corridor leading a procession. She would have made two of her daughter Ann, and more than half of Nero Wolfe. She was large not only in

bulk, but also in facial detail, large features so big that space above her chin was at a premium. Beside her was a thin, pleasant-looking young man wearing black-rimmed glasses. Behind them were two other males, one obviously, from his resemblance to Mother, Ann's brother Dick, and the other a tall, loose-jointed specimen who would have been called distinguished-looking by any woman between sixteen and sixty. As I made my swift survey the flamingo trainer talked on:

"Mother, this is Mr. Goodwin, the Archie Goodwin who was at the Churchill yesterday with Caroline and Paul. He's grilling me. Mr. Goodwin, my mother, my brother Dick, my husband, Norman Horne —no, not the one with the cheaters. That's Jim Beebe, the lawyer to end all laws—*This* is my husband." The distinguished-looking one had pushed by and was beside her. She was flowing on: "You know how disappointed I was at the district attorney being so polite to us, but Mr. Goodwin is different. He's going to give me the third degree, physically I mean. He's built for it, and I expect I'll go to pieces and confess—"

Her husband's palm, pressed over her mouth, firm but not rough, stopped her. "You talk too much, darling," he said tolerantly.

"It's her sense of humor," Aunt Margaret explained. "All the same, Ann dear, it *is* out of place, with poor Sidney just cruelly murdered."

"Nuts!" Dick Savage snapped.

"It *was* cruel," his mother insisted. "Murder *is* cruel."

"Sure, it is," he agreed, "but for us Sid has been dead more than two years, and he's been alive again only two weeks, and we never even saw him, so what do you expect?"

"I suggest," Beebe, the lawyer, hurriedly put in, "that this is rather a public spot for a private discussion. Shall we go?"

"I can't," Ann declared. "Mr. Goodwin is going to wear me down and finally break me. Look at his hard gray eyes. Look at his jaw."

"No, darling," Norman Horne said affectionately, and took her elbow and started her toward the door. The others filed after them, with Beebe in the rear. As I stood and watched the door closing behind them, the receptionist spoke:

"Mr. Mandelbaum will see you, Mr. Goodwin."

Only two assistant district attorneys rate corner rooms, and Mandelbaum wasn't one of them. Halfway down the corridor his door was standing open, and, entering, I had a surprise. Mandelbaum, middle-aged and plump, was at his desk, and across from him, on one of the two spare chairs, was a big, husky guy with graying hair, a broad red face, and gray eyes that had given tougher babies than Mrs. Norman Horne some trouble. If she called my eyes hard she should have seen those of Inspector Cramer of Homicide.

"I'm honored," I said apprecia-

tively, and accepted Mandelbaum's invitation to use the third chair.

"Look at me," Cramer commanded.

I hoisted my eyebrows, which always annoys him.

"I'm late for an appointment," he said, "so I'll cut it short. I've just been up to see Wolfe. Of course, he corroborates you, and he says he has no client. I've read your statement. I'm telling you frankly that we have no proof you entered that hotel room."

"Now I can breathe again," I said.

"Yeah. The day you stop, I'll eat as usual. We have no proof, as yet, that you went in that room, but I know damn' well you did. We were tipped off about the body by an anonymous phone call—obviously a disguised voice. You won't deny that I pretty well know by now how you react to situations."

"Sure. Boldly, bravely, and brilliantly."

"I only say I know. Leaving Aubry and Mrs. Karnow down in the grill, you go up and knock on the door of Karnow's room, and get no answer. In that situation there's not a chance in a thousand that you'd leave without trying the knob."

"Then I must have."

"So you did?"

I stayed patient and reasonable: "Either I didn't try the knob—"

"Can it. Of course you did, and you found the door wasn't locked. So you opened it, and called Kar-

now's name, and got no answer, and you went in and saw the body. That I know, because I know you, and also because of what followed. You went down to the grill and sat with them a while, and then took them back to Wolfe. Why? Because you knew Karnow had been murdered. If you had merely gone away when your knock wasn't answered, you would have stuck there until Karnow showed, even if it took all night. And that's not half of it. When Stebbins went to Wolfe's place after them, with no warrant and no charge entered, Wolfe meekly handed them over! He said they were no longer his clients, since Stebbins had brought the news that Karnow was dead. But why weren't they? Because he won't take a murderer for a client knowingly, and he thought Aubry had killed Karnow. That's why."

I shook my head. "Gee, if you already know everything, I don't see why you bother with me."

"I want to know exactly what you did in that room, and whether you changed anything or took anything." Cramer leaned to me: "Look, Goodwin; I advise you to unload. The way it's going, I fully expect Aubry to break before the day's out, and when he does we'll have it all, including what you told them you saw in Karnow's room when you rejoined them in the grill, and why the three of you returned to Wolfe's place. If you let me have it now, I won't hold it against you

that—What are you grinning for?"

"I'm thinking of Mr. Wolfe's face when I tell him this. When Stebbins came with the news that Karnow was dead, and the job went out the window, Mr. Wolfe hinted as far as his dignity would let him that he'd consider another job if they had one. But they side-stepped it. So this will upset him. He keeps telling me we mustn't get discouraged, that some day you will be right about something, but this will be a blow—"

Cramer got up and tramped from the room.

I let Mandelbaum have the tail end of the grin. "Is he getting more sensitive?"

"Some day," the Assistant D.A. declared, "certain people are going to decide that Wolfe and you are doing more harm than good, and you won't have so much fun without a license. I'm too busy to play games. Beat it."

When I got back to Thirty-Fifth Street, a little after noon, Wolfe was at his desk fiddling with stacks of cards from the files, plant germination records. I asked if he wanted a report of my visit with Mandelbaum and Cramer, and he said none was needed because he had talked with Cramer and knew the nature of his current befuddlement. I told him I had met Karnow's relatives and also his lawyer, and would he care for my impressions. I got no reply but a rude grunt, so I passed it

and went to my desk to finish some chores that had been interrupted by Stebbins's phone call. I had just started in when the doorbell rang. I went to the hall to answer it.

Caroline Karnow was there on the stoop. I opened the door. She stepped in.

"I want to see Mr. Wolfe," she blurted, and proved it by going right on, to the office door and in. I'm supposed to block visitors until I learn if Wolfe will see them, but it would have taken a flying tackle, and I let her go and merely followed. By the time I got there, she was sitting in the red-leather chair as if she owned it.

Wolfe, a germination card in each hand, was scowling at her.

"They've arrested him," she said. "For murder."

"Naturally," Wolfe growled.

"But he didn't do it!"

"Also naturally. I mean, naturally you would say that."

"But it's true! I want you to prove it."

Wolfe shook his head. "Not required. They must prove he did. You're all tense, madam. Too tense. Have you eaten today?"

"Good lord," she said, "all you two think about is eating! Last night him, and now—"

She started to laugh, at first a sort of gurgle, and then really out with it. I got up and went to her, took her head between my hands to turn her face up, and kissed her on the lips unmistakably. With some customers

that's more satisfactory than a slap, and just as effective. I paid no attention to her first convulsive jerks, and released her head only when she quit shaking and got hold of my hair. I pulled loose and backed up a step.

"What on earth—?" she gasped.

I decided she had snapped out of it, and went to the kitchen and asked Fritz to bring crackers and milk and hot coffee, and returned. As I sat at my desk she stared at me.

"Did you have to do that?"

"Look," I said; "evidently you came to get Mr. Wolfe to help you. He can't stand hysterical women, and in another four seconds he would have been out of the room and would have refused to see you again. I am going on talking to give both you and Mr. Wolfe a chance to calm down. If you think it's undesirable to be kissed by me, I'm willing to submit it to a vote by people who ought to know."

She was passing her hands over her hair. "I suppose I should thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Are you recovered," Wolfe rasped, "or not?"

"I'm all right." She swallowed. "I haven't slept, and it's quite true I haven't eaten anything, but I'm all right. They've arrested Paul for murder. He wants me to get a lawyer, and of course I must, but I don't know who. The one he uses in business is no good for this, and I don't want to ask Jim Beebe and two other lawyers I know—I don't

think they're much good. I told Paul I was coming to you, and he said all right."

"You want me to recommend a lawyer?"

"Yes, but we want you, too. We want you to do—well, whatever you do." Suddenly she was flushing, and the color was good for her face. "Paul says you charge very high, but I suppose I have lots of money again, now that Sidney is dead." The flush deepened. "I've got to tell you something: Last night when you told us about it; that Sidney had been murdered, for just one second I thought Paul had done it. One awful second."

"I know you did. Only, I would say ten seconds. Then you went to him."

"Yes. I went and touched him and let him touch me, and then it was over, but it was horrible. Do you believe Paul killed him?"

"No," Wolfe said flatly.

"You're not just saying that?"

"I never just say anything." Wolfe suddenly realized that he had swiveled his chair away from her when she started to erupt, and now swung it back. "Mr. Cramer, a policeman, came this morning and twitted me for having let a murderer hoodwink me. When he had gone, I considered the matter. It would have to be that Mr. Aubry, having killed Mr. Karnow, and having discussed it with you, decided to come and engage me to deal with Karnow in order to estab-

lish the fact that he didn't know Karnow was dead. That is Mr. Cramer's position, and I reject it. I sat here for an hour yesterday, listening to Mr. Aubry and looking at him; and if he had just come from killing the man he was asking me to deal with, I am a dolt. Since I *am not* a dolt, Mr. Aubry is not a murderer. Therefore—Yes, Fritz. Here's something for you, madam."

I would like to think it was my kiss that gave her an appetite, but I suppose it was the assurance from Wolfe that he didn't think her Paul was guilty of murder. She disposed of the crackers and milk, and also of a healthy portion of toast spread with Fritz's liver pâté and chives, while Wolfe worked with the cards and I found something to do.

"I do thank you," she said. "This is wonderful coffee. I feel better."

It is so agreeable to Wolfe to have someone enjoy food that he had almost forgiven her for losing control. He nearly smiled at her.

"You must understand," he said gruffly, "that if you hire me to investigate, there are no reservations. I think Mr. Aubry is innocent, but if I find he isn't, I am committed to no evasion or concealment. You understand that?"

"Yes. I don't—all right."

"For counsel I suggest Nathaniel Parker. Inquire about him if you wish; if you settle on him we'll arrange an appointment. Now, if Mr. Aubry didn't kill Karnow, who did?"

No reply.

"Well?" Wolfe demanded.

She put the coffee cup down.

"Are you asking me?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

"Then we'll return to that. You said Mr. Aubry has been arrested for murder. Has that charge been entered, or is he being held as a material witness?"

"No—murder. They said I couldn't get bail for him."

"Then they must have cogent evidence, surely something other than the manifest motive. He has talked, of course?"

"He certainly has."

"He has told of his going to the door of Karnow's room yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what time that was?"

"Half-past 3. Very close to that."

"Then opportunity is established, and motive. As for the weapon, the published account says it was Karnow's. Has that been challenged?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then the formula is complete. But a man cannot be convicted by a formula, and should not be charged by one. Have they got evidence? Do you know?"

"I know one thing." She was frowning at him, concentrated, intent. "They told Paul that one of his business cards was found in Sidney's pocket, the agency name and address, with his name in the corner.

They asked him to account for it. He told them that he and his salesmen hand out dozens of cards every day, and Sidney could have got one in many different places. Then they told him this card had his finger-prints on it, clear, fresh ones, and asked him to account for that."

"Could he?"

"He didn't tell them, but he did to me later, when they let me see him."

"How did he account for it?"

She hesitated. "He had remembered that last Friday afternoon, when he went to a conference at Jim Beebe's office, he left one of his cards there on Jim's desk."

"Who was at the conference?"

"Besides Paul, and Jim of course, there was Sidney's Aunt Margaret—Mrs. Savage—and Dick Savage, and Ann and her husband."

"Were you there?"

"No. I—I didn't want to go. I'd had enough of all the talk."

"You say he left one of his cards on Mr. Beebe's desk. Do you mean he remembers that the card was on the desk when he left the conference?"

"Yes, he's pretty sure it was. But, anyway, he left first. All the others were still there."

"Has Mr. Aubry now told the police of this?"

"I don't think so. He said he wouldn't because he thought it would look as if he were trying to accuse one of Sidney's relatives, and that would hurt more than it would help. That was why I didn't like

to tell you about it, but I knew I had to."

Wolfe grunted. "You did indeed, madam. You are in no position to afford the niceties of decent reticence. Since your husband was almost certainly killed by someone who was mortally inconvenienced by his resurrection, and we are excluding you and Mr. Aubry, his other heirs invite scrutiny and will get it. According to what Mr. Aubry told me yesterday, there are three of them—Mrs. Savage, her son, and her daughter. Where is Mr. Savage?"

"He died years ago. Mrs. Savage is Sidney's mother's sister."

"She got, as did her son and her daughter, nearly a third of a million. What did that sum mean to her? What were her circumstances?"

"I guess it meant a great deal. She wasn't well off."

"What was she living on?"

"Well—Sidney had been helping her."

Wolfe tightened his lips and turned a palm up. "My dear madam. Be as delicate as you please about judgments, but I merely want facts. Must I drag them out of you? A plain question—Was Mrs. Savage living on Mr. Karnow's bounty?"

She swallowed. "Yes."

"What has she done with her legacy? Has she conserved it? Give me the facts as you know them."

"No, she hasn't." Caroline's chin lifted a little. "You're quite right, I'm being silly—and, anyway, lots of

people know all about it. Mrs. Savage bought a house in New York, and last winter she bought a villa in southern France, and she wears expensive clothes and gives big parties. I don't know how much she has left. Dick had a job with a downtown broker, but he quit when he got the inheritance from Sidney, and he is still looking for something to do. He is—Well, he likes to be with women. It's hard to be fair to Ann because she has wasted herself. She is beautiful and clever, and she's only twenty-six. But there she is, married to Norman Horne, just throwing herself away."

"What does Mr. Horne do?"

"He tells people about the time twelve years ago when he scored four touchdowns for Yale against Princeton."

"Is that lucrative?"

"No. He says he isn't fitted for a commercial society. I can't stand him, and I don't understand how Ann can. They live in an apartment on Park Avenue, and she pays the rent, and, as far as I know, she pays everything. She must."

"Hm-m," Wolfe sighed. "So that's the job. While Mr. Aubry's motive was admittedly more powerful than theirs, since he stood to lose not only his fortune, but also his wife, they were by no means immune to temptation. How much have you been associating with them the past two years?"

"Not much. With Aunt Margaret and Dick, almost not at all.

I used to see Ann fairly often, but very little since she married Norman Horne."

"When was that marriage?"

"Two years ago. Soon after the estate was distributed." She stopped, and then decided to go on: "That was one of Ann's unpredictable somersaults. She was engaged to Jim Beebe, announced publicly and the date set, and then, without even bothering to break it off, she married Norman Horne."

"Was Mr. Horne a friend of your husband's?"

"No, they never met. Ann found Norman—I don't know where. They wouldn't have been friends even if they had met, because Sidney wouldn't have liked him. There weren't many people Sidney did like."

"Did he like his relatives?"

"No. If you want facts, he didn't. But he did feel they were his responsibility."

"I see." Wolfe leaned back and closed his eyes, and his lips began to work, pushing out and then pulling in, out and in, out and in. He only does that when he has something substantial to churn around in his skull. But that time I thought he was being a little premature, since he hadn't even seen them yet, not one. Caroline started to say something, but I shook my head at her and she subsided.

Finally Wolfe opened his eyes and spoke: "You understand, madam, that the circumstances—particularly

the finding of Mr. Aubry's card, bearing his fingerprints, on the body —warrant an explicit assumption: that your husband was killed by one of the six persons present at the conference in Mr. Beebe's office Friday afternoon. Eliminating Mr. Aubry, five are left. You know them all, if not intimately, at least familiarly, and I ask you, is one of them more likely than another? For any reason at all?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. Do we have to—is this the only way?"

"It is. That's our assumption until it's discredited. I want your best answer."

"I don't know," she insisted.

I decided to contribute. "I doubt," I put in, "if this would be a good buy at a nickel, but this morning, at the D.A.'s office, I met the whole bunch. I had a little chat with Mrs. Horne, who seems to like gags, and when the others appeared she introduced me to them. She told them I was going to give her the third degree, and she added, I quote, 'I expect I'll go to pieces and confess—' Unquote. At that point Horne put his hand on her mouth and told her she talked too much. Mrs. Savage said it was her sense of humor."

"That's like Ann," Caroline said. "Exactly like her, at her worst."

Wolfe grunted. "Mr. Goodwin has a knack for putting women at their worst. He's no help, and neither are you. You seem not to

realize that unless I can expose one of those five as the murderer of your husband, Mr. Aubry is almost certainly doomed."

"I do realize it. It's awful, but I do." Her lips tightened. In a moment she spoke: "And I want to help! All night I was trying to think, and one thing I thought of—what Sidney said in his letter about something that would shock me. You said yesterday it's not simple to disinherit a wife, but couldn't he have done it some other way? Couldn't he have signed something that would give someone a claim on the estate, perhaps the whole thing? Isn't there some way he could have arranged for the—shock?"

"Conceivably," Wolfe admitted. "But there would have had to be an authentic transfer of ownership and possession, and there wasn't. Or if he established a trust, it would have had to be legally recorded, and the estate would never have been distributed. You'll have to do better than that." He cleared his throat explosively and straightened up. "Very well. I must tackle them. Will you please have them here at 6 o'clock, madam?"

Her eyes widened at him. "Me? Bring them here?"

"Certainly."

"But I can't! How? What could I say? I can't tell them that you think one of them killed Sidney, and you want—No! I can't!" She came forward in the chair. "Don't

you see it's just impossible? Anyhow, they wouldn't come!"

Wolfe turned. "Archie. You'll have to get them. I prefer 6 o'clock, but if that isn't feasible, after dinner will do." He glanced up at the wall clock. "Phone Mr. Parker and make an appointment for Mrs. Karnow. Phone Saul and tell him I want him here as soon as possible. Then lunch. After lunch, proceed." He turned to the client: "Will you join us, madam? Fritz's rice and mushroom fritters are, if I may say so, palatable."

Since this is a democracy, thank God, please prepare to vote. All those in favor of my describing in full detail my five hours of effort to fill Wolfe's order for three males and two females, say aye. I hear none. Since my eardrums are sensitive, I won't ask for the no's.

Then I'll sketch it:

James M. Beebe, I found, was not one of the machines in the huge legal factories that occupy so many floors in New York's skyscrapers. He was soloing it in a small office on the tenth floor of a mid-town building. The woman in the anteroom, apparently the only employee, said Mr. Beebe would be back soon. If you call thirty-five minutes soon, he was.

The inner room we entered must have been a little cramped with a conference of six people. Its furniture was adequate, but by no means ornate. When I showed him my

credentials, a note signed by Caroline Karnow saying that Nero Wolfe was acting for her, and told him that Wolfe would like to discuss the situation with those chiefly concerned that evening, he said he understood that the police investigation was making progress, and that he questioned the wisdom of an investigation of a murder by a private detective.

Wise or not, I said, Mrs. Karnow surely had the right to hire Wolfe if she wanted to. He conceded that. Also, surely, the widow of his former friend and client might reasonably expect him to cooperate in an effort to discover the truth. Wasn't that so?

He looked uncomfortable. "It's like this, Mr. Goodwin," he said. "I sympathize deeply with Mrs. Karnow, of course. But I'm under no obligation to her, only to my late friend and client, Sidney Karnow. I certainly will do anything I can to help discover the truth. But it's justifiable to suppose that in employing Nero Wolfe, Mrs. Karnow's primary purpose, if not her sole purpose, is to save Paul Aubry. As an officer of the law, I cannot conscientiously participate in that. I am not Aubry's attorney. I beg you to understand."

I kept after him. He stood pat. Finally, following instructions from Wolfe, I put a question to him:

"I suppose you won't mind helping to clear up a detail. At a conference in this room last Friday

afternoon, Aubry left one of his business cards on your desk. It was there when he left. What happened to it?"

He cocked his head and frowned. "Here on my desk?"

"Right."

The frown deepened. "I'm trying to remember—Yes, I do remember. He suggested I might phone him later, and he put it there."

"What happened to it?"

"I don't know."

"Did you phone him?"

"No. As it turned out, there was no occasion to."

"Would you mind seeing if the card is around? It's fairly important."

"Why is it important?"

"That's a long story. But I would like very much to see that card. Will you take a look?"

He wasn't enthusiastic about it, but he obliged. He looked among and under things on top of his desk, including the blotter, in the desk drawers, and around the room some, even on top of a filing cabinet. I got down on my knees to see under the desk. No card.

I scrambled to my feet. "May I ask your secretary?"

"What's this all about?" he demanded.

"Nothing you would care to participate in. But the easiest way to get rid of me is to humor me on this one little detail."

He lifted the phone and spoke to it, and in a moment the door opened

and the employee entered. He told her I wanted to ask her something, and I did so. She said she knew nothing about any card of Paul Aubry's. She had never seen one, on Beebe's desk or anywhere else, last Friday or any other day. That settled, she backed out, pulling the door shut after her.

"It's a little discouraging," I told Beebe. "I was counting on collecting that card. Are you sure you don't remember seeing one of the others pick it up?"

"I've told you all I remember—that Aubry put a card on my desk."

"Was there an opportunity for one of them to pick it up without your noticing?"

"There might have been. I'm not sure what you're trying to establish, Mr. Goodwin. But probably, during the meeting here on Friday, I had occasion to leave this chair to get something from my files. I won't say that gave someone an opportunity to remove something from my desk, but I can't prohibit you from saying so." He got to his feet and smiled ruefully. "I'm sorry I can't be more helpful."

"So am I," I said emphatically. I arose and turned to go, but when I was halfway to the door he called: "Mr. Goodwin."

I turned. He had left his chair and was standing at the end of the desk, stiff and straight.

"I'm a lawyer," he said in a different tone, "but I am also a man. Speaking as a man, I ask you to

consider my position. My friend and client has been murdered, and the police are apparently convinced that they have the murderer in custody. Nero Wolfe, acting for Mrs. Karnow, wants to prove them wrong. His only hope of success is to fasten the guilt elsewhere. Isn't that the situation?"

"Roughly, yes."

"And you ask me to cooperate. You mentioned a conference in this office last Friday. Besides myself, there were five people here—you know who they were. None of them was, or is, my client. They were all dismayed by the return of Sidney Karnow alive. They were all in dread of personal financial calamity. They all asked me, one way or another, to intercede for them. I have, of course, given this information to the police, and I see no impropriety in my giving it also to Nero Wolfe. Beyond that, I have absolutely no information or evidence that could possibly help him. I tell you frankly, if Paul Aubry is guilty, I hope he is convicted and punished; but if one of the others is guilty, I hope he—or she—is punished, and if I knew anything pertinent to that end, I certainly would not withhold it."

He lifted a hand and dropped it. "All I'm trying to say—as a lawyer I'm not supposed to be vindictive, but as a man perhaps I am a little. Whoever killed Sidney Karnow should be punished." He turned and went back to his chair.

"Fine sentiment," I agreed.

On the way to the next customer, I found a booth and phoned Wolfe a report. All I got in return was a series of grunts.

The house Mrs. Savage had bought was in the Sixties, east of Lexington Avenue. I am not an expert on Manhattan real estate, but after a look at the narrow gray-brick, three-layer item, my guess was that it had set her back a cool hunk of her three hundred thousand. When there was no answer to my rings, I felt cheated. I hadn't expected anything as lavish as a dolled-up butler, but—not even a maid to receive detectives?

It was only a ten-minute walk to the Park Avenue address of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Horne. My luck stayed stubborn. The hallman said they were both out, phoned up at my request, and got no answer.

I like to walk around Manhattan, catching glimpses of its wild life, the pigeons and cats and girls, but that day I overdid it, back and forth between my two objectives. Finally, from an ambush in a diner on Sixty-Eighth Street, I saw Aunt Margaret navigate the sidewalk across the street and enter the gray brick. I left the diner, crossed over, and pushed the button. She opened the door a few inches, thought she saw a journalist, said, "I have nothing to say," and would have closed the door if it hadn't been for my foot.

"Wait a minute," I objected, "we've been introduced. By your

daughter, this morning. The name is Archie Goodwin."

She let the door come open another inch for a better view of me, and the pressure of my foot kept it going. I crossed the threshold.

"Of course," she said. "We were rude to you, weren't we? That I have nothing to say is what they told me I must say to everybody, but it's quite true that my daughter introduced you, and we *were* rude. What do you want?"

She sounded to me like a godsend. If I could kidnap her and get her down to the office, and phone the rest of them that we had her and she was being very helpful, it was a good bet that they would all come on the run to yank her out of our clutches.

I gave her a friendly eye and a warm smile. "I'll tell you, Mrs. Savage. As your daughter told you, I work for Nero Wolfe. He thinks there are some aspects of this situation that haven't been sufficiently considered. To mention only one, there's the legal principle that a criminal may not profit by his crime. If it should be proven that Aubry killed your nephew, and that Mrs. Karnow was an accessory, what happens to her half of the estate? Does it go to you and your son and daughter, or what? That's the sort of thing Mr. Wolfe wants to discuss with you. If you'll come on down to his office with me, he's waiting there for you. He wants to know how you feel about it, and he

wants your advice. It will only take us—"

A roar came from above: "What's going on, Mumsey?" Heavy feet were descending stairs behind Mrs. Savage, in a hurry.

She turned. "Oh, Dickie! I supposed you were asleep."

He was in a silk dressing gown that must have accounted for at least two C's of Cousin Sidney's dough. I could have choked him. He had been there all the time. After ignoring all my bell-ringing for the past two hours, here he was horning in just when I was getting a good start on a snatch.

"You remember Mr. Goodwin," his mother was telling him. "Down at that place this morning? He wants to take me to see Nero Wolfe. Mr. Wolfe wants to ask my advice about a very interesting point. I think I should go, I really do."

"I don't," Dick said bluntly.

"But, Dickie," she appealed, "I'm sure you agree that we should do all we can to get this awful business over and done with!"

"Sure, I do," he conceded. "But I don't see how it could help for you to go and discuss it with a private detective."

They looked at each other. The mutual resemblance was so remarkable that you might say they had the same face, allowing for the difference in age. Also, they were built alike. Her bulk was more bone and meat than fat, and so was his.

When she spoke I got a suspicion

that I had misjudged her. Her tone was new, dry and cool and meaningful. "I think I ought to go," she said.

He appealed now. "Please, Mumsey. At least, we can talk it over. You can go later, after dinner." He turned to me. "Could she see Wolfe this evening?"

"Now would be better."

"I really am tired," she told me. Her tone was back to what might have been normal. "All this awful business. After dinner would be better. What is the address?"

I got my wallet, took out a card, and handed it to her. "By the way," I observed, "that reminds me. At that meeting last Friday at Mr. Beebe's office, Aubry put one of his cards on Beebe's desk and left it there. Do you happen to remember what became of it?"

Mrs. Savage said promptly, "I remember he took out a card, but I don't—"

"Hold it," Dick barked at her, gripping her arm so hard that she winced. "Go upstairs."

She tried to twist loose, found it wouldn't work, and leveled her eyes at him to stare him off. That didn't work, either. His eyes were as level as hers, and harder and meaner. Four seconds of it was enough for her. When he turned her around she didn't resist and, without a word, she walked to the stairs and started up. He faced me again.

"What's this about a card?"

"What I said. Aubry put one on Beebe's desk—"

"Who says he did?"

"Aubry."

"Yeah? A guy in for murder? Come again."

"Glad to. Beebe says so, too."

Dick snorted. He lifted a hand to tap my chest with a finger, but a short backward step took me out of range. "Listen, brother. If you and your boss think you can frame an out for Aubry don't let me stop you, but don't come trying to work my mother in, or me, either."

"I merely want to know—"

"The way out," he said rudely, and strode to the door and opened it. Since I stay where I'm not wanted only when there is a chance of gaining something, I took advantage of his courtesy and passed on through to the sidewalk.

I was getting low on prospects. Back at the Park Avenue address, where the hallman and I by now were on intimate terms, he informed me that Mrs. Horne had come in, and he had told her that Mr. Goodwin had called several times and would return. She had left word to send me up.

At Apartment D on the twelfth floor I was admitted by a maid, properly outfitted, who showed me to a living room where a slice of Karnow's money had been used with no great taste, but a keen eye to comfort. I sat down, and almost at once got up again when Ann Horne entered. She met me and offered a hand.

"We'll have to hurry," she said. "My husband may be home any minute. What do you do first, rubber hose?"

She was wearing a nice, simple yellow dress that either was silk or wanted to be, and had renovated her make-up since coming in from the street.

"Not here," I told her. "Get the stole. I'm taking you to a dungeon."

She flowed onto a couch. "Sit down and describe it to me. Rats, I hope?"

"No, we can't get rats to stay. Bad air." I sat. "As a matter of fact, I've decided the physical approach wouldn't work with you, and we're going after you mentally. That's Mr. Wolfe's department, and he never leaves the house, so I've come to take you down there. You can leave word for your husband and he can join us."

"That doesn't appeal to me at all. Mentally, I'm a wreck. What's the matter—afraid I can't take it?"

"On the contrary, I'm afraid I can't give it. Nature went to a lot of trouble with you and I'd hate to spoil it. You'd enjoy a session with Nero Wolfe. He's afraid of women anyhow, and you'd scare him stiff."

She pulled a routine that I approved of. Knowing that if she took a cigarette I'd have to get up to light it, she first picked up a lighter and flicked it on, and then reached to a box for the cigarette. A darned good idea.

"What's the score?" she asked, after inhaling and letting it out.

I told her: "Paul Aubry is charged with murder. Mr. Wolfe can earn a big fee only by clearing him. Mr. Wolfe has never let a big fee get away. So Aubry will be cleared. We'll be glad to let you share the glory, though not the fee. Get the stole and let's go."

"You're irresistible," she said admiringly. "It's too bad about Paul."

"Not at all. When he gets out he can marry his wife."

"If he gets out. Do you remember nursery rhymes?"

"I wrote them."

"Then of course you remember this one:

"Needles and pins,
Needles and pins,
When a man murders
His trouble begins."

"Sure, that's one of my favorites. Only, Aubry didn't murder."

She nodded. "That's your line, of course, and you're stuck with it." She reached to crush her cigarette in a tray, then suddenly turned to me with her eyes flashing. "All this poppycock! All this twaddle about life being sacred! For everybody there's just one life that's sacred, and everybody knows it! Mine!" She spread her hand on her breast. "Mine! And Sidney's was sacred to him, but he's dead. So it's too bad about Paul."

"If you feel that way about it you ought to be ready to give him a lift."

"I might be if I had anything to lift with."

"Maybe I can furnish something. Last Friday you were at a conference at Jim Beebe's office. Aubry put one of his business cards on Beebe's desk. Why did you pick up that card and what did you do with it?"

She stared at me a moment. Then she shook her head. "You'll have to get out the rubber hose, or pliers to pull out my nails. Even then I may hold out."

"Didn't you pick up the card?"

"I did not."

"Then who did?"

"I have no idea—if there was a card."

"You don't remember Aubry putting it on the desk? Or seeing it there?"

"No. But this begins to sound like something. You sound as if you're really detecting. Are you?"

I nodded. "This is called the double sly squeeze. First I get you to deny you touched the card, which I have done. Then I display one of Aubry's cards in a cellophane envelope, tell you it has fingerprints on it which I suspect are yours, and dare you to let me take your prints so I can check. You're afraid to refuse—"

"Come and show me how you take my prints. I've never had it done."

I was, I admit it, curious. Was she inviting physical contact because she was like that, or was she expecting to voodoo me, or was she merely passing the time? To find out, I got up and went to her, took her offered hand and got it snugly in mine,

palm up, and bent over it for a close-up. The hand seemed to be telling me that it didn't mind the operation at all, and with the fingers of my other hand I spread her fingers apart, bending lower.

Of course, I was concentrated on the job. Whether the door from the outside hall to the foyer was opened so quietly that no sound came, or whether I heard but ignored it, I don't remember. But my investigation was interrupted by her sudden tight grip on my hand as she straightened up and cried, "Don't! You're hurting me! Norman—thank God!"

My whirl around was checked for a second by her hold on my hand. For her size and sex she had muscle. I suppose to Norman Horne, approaching from behind me, it could have looked as if I were holding her, instead of her me. But, even so, it must have been obvious that I was turning. He might have held his fire until I could at least see it coming. As it was, I was off balance when he plugged me on the side of the jaw, and I went clear down, sprawling. Added to the four touchdowns he had scored for Yale against Princeton, that made five.

"He was trying to force me—" Ann was saying, with her sense of humor.

Probably I would have scrambled to my feet and departed, since Wolfe wouldn't have appreciated my letting my personal feelings take charge when I was on a job, if it

hadn't been for Horne's attitude. He was glaring down at me, with his fists ready, and it was doubtful if he'd wait till I got up on my knees. So I did a quick double roll, sprang all the way up, and faced him. He came at me wide open, as if I were a department-store dummy, and swung. There wasn't the slightest excuse for my missing the exact spot for a kidney punch, and I didn't. Air exploded out of him and he crumpled, not sprawling, but in a compact heap.

His attractive wife took a couple of steps toward him, stopped to look at me, started to snarl something, and then just glared.

"I oughta spank you," I told her emphatically, turned, went to the foyer and got my hat, and let myself out. On the way down in the elevator, I felt my jaw and took a look at it in the mirror, and decided I would live.

I got home just at the dinner hour, 7:30. Since it takes an earthquake to postpone a meal in that house, and no mention of business is permitted at the table, my full report of the afternoon had to wait. If the main dish had been something like goulash or calves' brains, probably nothing unusual in my technique would have been apparent. But it was squab, which of course has to be gnawed off the bones. While I was working on the second one, Wolfe demanded:

"What the deuce is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You're not eating, you're nibbling."

"Yeah. Broken jaw. With the compliments of Ann Horne."

He stared. "A *woman* broke your jaw?"

"Sorry, no shop talk at meals. I'll tell you later."

I did so, in the office after dinner, and after I had looked into a little matter I was wondering about. Before lunch I had phoned Saul Panzer, who was by far the best of the four men Wolfe calls in when we need help. Saul had said he would be at the office at 2:30. By that time I had left. When, on the way from the dining room to the office, I asked Wolfe if Saul had come, he replied in one word, "Yes," indicating that that was all I needed to know about it. Thinking it wouldn't hurt me to know a little more, I went and opened the safe and got out the little book from the cash drawer. Sometimes, in addition to the name and date and amount, Wolfe scribbles something about the purpose, but that time he hadn't. The latest entry was merely the date and "SP \$1,000." I wondered what Saul had bought that might cost as much as a grand.

As I reported on my afternoon rounds, giving all conversations verbatim, which isn't so hard when you've had plenty of practice and know that nothing less will be acceptable, Wolfe leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed. He was

entirely too placid. Ordinarily, when he sends out for bacon and I return empty-handed, he makes some pointed cracks, no matter how hopeless the errand might be. But he didn't say a thing. That meant he either didn't like the job, or that I was just a side show, including my sore jaw, and the main attraction was elsewhere. When I was through, he didn't open his eyes or ask a single question.

I groaned with pain. "Since it's obvious that I wasted five hours of your time, and may rile you if I say something, I guess I'll go see Doc Vollmer and have him set my jaw. He'll probably have to wire it."

"No."

"No what?"

He opened his eyes. "I'm expecting a phone call. Probably not until tomorrow, but it could come this evening. If it does, I'll need you."

"Okay, I'll be upstairs."

I mounted the two flights to my room, turned on the lights, went to the bathroom mirror to see if there was enough swelling for a compress. I decided there wasn't, and settled myself in my easy chair with a collection of magazines.

Nearly two hours went by, and I was yawning, when a sound came faintly through the open door — the sound of Wolfe's voice. I went and lifted the phone on my bedside table and put it to my ear. It was dead. I had neglected to plug it in when I left the office. It would have been undignified to go to the hall, to

the stair landing, and listen, so I did. Wolfe's voice came up at intervals, but I couldn't get the words. After enough of that I returned to the room and the easy chair, but had barely lowered myself into it when a bellow came from below: "Archie! Archie!"

I didn't descend the stairs three steps at a time, but I didn't mosey, either. Wolfe, at his desk, spoke as I entered the office:

"Get Mr. Cramer."

Getting Inspector Cramer of Homicide, day or night, may be very simple or it may be impossible. That time it was in between. He was at his office on Twentieth Street, but in conference and not available. So I had to bear down and make it plain that if he didn't speak with Nero Wolfe immediately, God only knew what tomorrow's papers would say. In a couple of minutes his familiar voice was growling at me:

"Goodwin? Is Wolfe on?"

I nodded at Wolfe and he took up his phone. "Mr. Cramer? I don't know if you know that I'm investigating the Karnow murder. For a client. Mrs. Karnow engaged me at noon today."

"Go ahead and investigate. What do you want?"

"I understand that Mr. Aubry is being held on a murder charge, without bail. That's regrettable, because he's innocent. If you are supporting that charge I advise you to reconsider. On the soundness of that advice, I stake my reputation."

I would have paid admission to see Cramer's face. He knew Wolfe would rather go without eating a whole day than be caught wrong in a flat statement like that.

"That's all I wanted, your advice." The growl was still a growl, but not the same. "Is it all right if I wait till morning to turn him loose?"

"Formalities may require it. May I ask a question? How many of the others — Mrs. Savage, her son, Mr. and Mrs. Horne, Mr. Beebe — have been eliminated by alibis?"

"Crossed off, no one. But Aubry not only has no alibi, he admits he was there."

"Yes, I know. However, it was one of the others. I must now choose between alternatives. Either I proceed independently to disclose and hand over the culprit, or I invite you to partake. Which would you prefer?"

It was nearly silence, but I thought I could hear Cramer breathe. "Are you saying you've got it?"

"I'm saying I am prepared to expose the murderer. It would be a little simpler if you can spare the time, for I must have them here at my office, and for you that will be no problem. If you care to take part, you could get them here in half an hour."

Cramer cussed. Since it's a misdemeanor to use profanity over the phone, and since I don't want to hang a misdemeanor rap on an

inspector, I won't quote it. He added, "I'm coming up there. I'll be there in five minutes."

"You won't get in." Wolfe wasn't nasty, but he was firm. "If you come without those people, or without first assuring me that they will be brought, Mr. Goodwin won't even open the door to the crack the chain bolt will permit. He's in a touchy mood because a man hit him on the jaw and knocked him down. Nor am I in any humor to wrangle with you. I gave you your chance. Do you remember that when you were here this morning I told you that I had the last letter Mrs. Karnow received from her husband, and offered to show it to you?"

"Yes."

"And you said you weren't interested in a letter Karnow wrote nearly three years ago. You were wrong. I now offer again to show it to you before I send it to the District Attorney, but only on the condition as stated. Well?"

I'll say one thing for Cramer, he knew when he was out of choices, and he didn't try to prolong it: He cussed again and then got it out: "They'll be there, and so will I."

Wolfe hung up. I asked him, "What about our client? Hadn't she better be present?"

He made a face. "I suppose so. See if you can get her."

It was half-past 11 when I ushered Norman Horne and his attractive wife into the office and to the two

vacant seats in the cluster of chairs facing Wolfe's desk. At their left was Mrs. Savage; behind them, Dick Savage, James M. Beebe, and Sergeant Purley Stebbins—only not in that order, because Purley was in the middle, behind Ann Horne. There had been another chair in the cluster, for Caroline Karnow, but she had moved it away, over to the side of the room where the bookshelves were, while I was in the hall admitting Mrs. Savage and Dick. That had put her where Purley couldn't see her without turning his head a full quarter-circle, and he didn't like it. But I let him know that it was none of his business where our client sat.

The red-leather chair was for Cramer, who was in the dining room with Wolfe. After the Horne's had greeted their relatives, including Caroline, and were seated, I crossed to the dining room and told Wolfe we were ready. He marched into the office to his desk, and stood.

"Archie. Introductions, please."

"Yes, sir." I was there. "Front row, from the left, Mr. Horne, Mrs. Horne, Mrs. Savage. Rear, from the left, Mr. Savage, Mr. Stebbins you know, and Mr. Beebe."

Wolfe nodded almost perceptibly, sat, and turned his head. "Mr. Cramer?"

Cramer, standing, was surveying them. "I can't say this is unofficial," he conceded, "since I asked you to come here, and I'm here. But anything Mr. Wolfe says to you is solely

on his own responsibility. You're under no obligation to answer any questions he asks if you don't want to. I want that clearly understood."

"Even so," Beebe said, "isn't this rather irregular?"

"If you mean unusual, yes. If you mean improper, I don't think so. You weren't ordered to come, you were asked, and you're here. Do you want to leave?"

Apparently they didn't, at least not enough to make an issue of it. They exchanged glances, and someone muttered something. Beebe said, "We certainly reserve the right to leave."

"Nobody will stop you," Cramer assured him, and sat. He looked at Wolfe. "Go ahead."

Wolfe adjusted himself in his chair to achieve the maximum of comfort, and then moved his eyes, left and right, to take them in. He spoke: "Mr. Cramer assured you that you are not obliged to answer my questions. I can relieve your minds of that concern. I doubt if I'll have a single question to put to any of you, though of course an occasion for one may arise. I merely want to describe the situation as it now stands and invite your comment. You may have none."

He interlaced his fingers at the crest of his central bulge. "The news that Mr. Karnow had been murdered was brought here by Mr. Stebbins early last evening. My interest in it was only casual until Mrs. Karnow came at noon today

and aroused it by hiring me. Then I gave it my attention, and it seemed to me that your obvious motive for murder—Mrs. Savage and her son and daughter, and Mr. Horne as the daughter's husband—was not very compelling. From what my client told me of Mr. Karnow's character and temperament, it seemed unlikely that any of you would be driven to the dangerous and desperate act of murder. You have received your legacies legally and properly, in good faith, and surely you would at least have first tried an appeal to his reason and his grace. So one of you must have had another and stronger motive."

Wolfe cleared his throat. "That derogation of your obvious motives put me up a stump. There were two people with overpowering motives—Mr. Aubry and Mrs. Karnow. Not only did they stand to forfeit a much larger sum than any of you, but they also faced a deprivation even more intolerable. He would lose her, and she would lose him. It is not surprising that Mr. Cramer and his colleagues were dazzled by the glitter of that powerful motive. I might have been similarly bemused—but for two circumstances:

"The first was that I had concluded that neither Mrs. Karnow nor Mr. Aubry had committed murder. If they had, they had come fresh from that ferocious deed to engage me to negotiate with the man one of them had just killed. That could only be for the devious

purpose of raising the presumption that they didn't know he was dead. I conversed with them for an hour without feeling any twinge of suspicion that they were diddling me. I was compelled either to reject that notion or abandon certain pretensions that feed my ego. The choice wasn't difficult."

"Also, Mrs. Karnow was your client," Cramer said pointedly.

Wolfe ignored it, which was just as well. He went on: "The second circumstance was the possibility of another motive. It was suggested in a letter which Mrs. Karnow showed me yesterday—the last letter she received from her husband, nearly three years ago." He opened a drawer and took out sheets of paper. "Here it is. I'll read only the pertinent excerpt:

"Speaking of death, if I don't come back, something I did before I left New York will give you quite a shock. I wish I could be around to see how you take it. You claim you have never worried about money, that it's not worth it. You've also told me that I always talk sardonic, but haven't got it in me to act sardonic. This will show you. I'll admit I have to die to get the last laugh, but that will be sardonic too. I wonder do I love you or hate you? These emotions are hard to tell apart. Remember me in thy dreams."

He returned the papers to the drawer and closed it. "Mrs. Karnow had the notion that what her husband had done was to make a new will, leaving her out. But that the-

ory was open to two objections. First, a wife cannot be so brusquely disinherited by a man of means. Secondly, such an act would have been merely malicious, not sardonic. But the phrase 'speaking of death' did imply some connection with his will, and raised a question. How might such a man have so remade his will as to cause such a woman to worry about money? That intention was clearly implied."

Wolfe turned a hand over. "Under the circumstances as I knew them, a plausible conjecture offered itself: that Karnow had made a new will leaving everything to his wife. That would certainly give her an inescapable worry about money, the same worry with which he had to contend—How much should his relatives be pampered? And since it was his money and they were his relatives, for her the worry would be even more bothersome than for him. I would call that sardonic. Also, he might have been moved by another consideration, a reluctance to bestow large amounts on them. I gathered, though Mrs. Karnow didn't make it explicit, that in matters of personal finance and economy Karnow did not regard his relatives as paragons—a judgment that has been verified by their management of their bequests."

Ann Horne's head jerked around and she told Caroline, "Thank you so much, Lina darling."

Caroline made no reply. Judging from her intent face and rigid pos-

ture, if she replied it would be an explosion.

"Therefore," Wolfe resumed, "it appeared that the hypothesis that Karnow had made a new will deserved a little exploration. To ask any of you about it would, of course, have been jackassery. It was reasonable to suppose that for such a chore he would have called upon his friend and attorney, Mr. Beebe, but it seemed impolitic to approach Mr. Beebe on the matter. I don't know whether any of you has ever heard the name, Saul Panzer?"

No reply. No shake of a head. They might all have been in a trance.

"I employ Mr. Panzer," Wolfe said, "on important missions for which Mr. Goodwin cannot be spared. He has extraordinary qualities and abilities. I told him that if Mr. Beebe had drafted a new will for Mr. Karnow, it had probably been typed by his secretary, and Mr. Panzer undertook to see Mr. Beebe's secretary and try to get on terms with her without arousing her suspicion. Early this afternoon he called on her in the guise of an investigator from the Federal Security Agency, wanting to clear up some confusion about her social security number."

"Impersonating an officer of the law," Beebe protested.

"Possibly," Wolfe conceded. "If such an investigator is an officer of the law, he is a federal officer, and Mr. Panzer can await his doom. In

ten minutes he collected an arsenal of data. Mr. Beebe's secretary, whose name is Vera O'Brien, has been with him two and one-half years. Her predecessor, whose name was Helen Martin, left Mr. Beebe's employ in November, 1951, to marry a man named Arthur Rabson, and went to live with her husband in Florence, South Carolina, where he owns a garage. So, if Karnow made a new will before he left New York, and if Mr. Beebe drafted it, and if Mr. Beebe's secretary typed it, it was typed by the now Mrs. Arthur Rabson."

"Three if's," Cramer muttered.

"Yes," Wolfe agreed, "but open for test. I was tempted to get Mrs. Rabson on the phone in South Carolina, but it was too risky, so Mr. Panzer took a plane to Columbia, and I phoned there and chartered a smaller one to take him on to Florence. An hour ago, or a little more, I got a phone call from him. He has talked with Mrs. Rabson, she has signed a statement, and she is willing to come to New York, if necessary. She says that Mr. Beebe dictated to her a new will for Mr. Karnow in the fall of 1951, that she typed it, and that she was one of the witnesses to Karnow's signature. The other witness was a woman named Nora Wayne, from a nearby office. She supposes that Miss Wayne did not know the contents of the will. By it Karnow left everything to his wife, and it contained a request that she use discretion in

making provision for Karnow's relatives, who were named. Mrs. Rabson didn't know that—"

"Sidney wouldn't do that!" Aunt Margaret cried. "I don't believe it! Jim, are you going to just sit there?"

All eyes were on Beebe except Wolfe's. His were on the move. "I should explain," he said, "that meanwhile Mr. Goodwin was making himself useful. He learned, for instance, that the only item of tangible evidence against Mr. Aubrey, a card of his that was found in Mr. Karnow's pocket, had been accessible to all of you last Friday in Mr. Beebe's office."

"How's that?" Cramer demanded. "I want it."

"You'll get it," Wolfe assured him, "and you'll like it." He focused on Beebe: "The occasion has arisen, Mr. Beebe, for a question. As Mr. Cramer told you, you're not obliged to answer it. What happened to Mr. Karnow's last will?"

Thinking it over later, I decided that Beebe probably took his best bet. He being a lawyer, you might suppose that he would simply have clammed up. But knowing, as he did, that he was absolutely hooked on the will, he undoubtedly figured, in the short time he had for figuring, that the best way was to go ahead and take the little one, so as to dodge the big one.

He addressed Cramer: "I would like to speak to you privately, Inspector. You and Mr. Wolfe, if you want him present."

Cramer glanced at Wolfe.

Wolfe said, "No. You may refuse to answer, or you may answer here and now."

"Very well." Beebe straightened his shoulders and lifted his chin. At the angle I had on him I couldn't see his eyes behind the black-rimmed glasses. "This will ruin me professionally, and I bitterly regret the part I have played. It was a month or so before the notice came that Sidney had been killed in action that I told Ann about the new will he had made. That was my first mistake. I did it because I—of the way I felt about her. At that time I would have done just about anything she wanted. When word came that Sidney had been killed she came to my office and insisted on my showing her the will. I was even—"

"Watch it, Jim!" Ann, turned in her chair, called to him. "You dirty little liar. Ad-libbing it, you'll get all twisted—"

"Mrs. Horne!" Wolfe said sharply. "Would you rather hear him, or be taken from the room?"

She stayed turned to Beebe: "Go on, Jim, but watch it."

Beebe resumed, "I was then even more infatuated with her than before. I got the will from the safe and showed it to her, and she took it and stuffed it inside her dress. She insisted on taking it to show to her mother. It's easy to say I should have gone to any length to prevent that. It's easy now, but then I was

incapable of opposing her. She took the will with her and I never saw it again. Two weeks later our engagement was publicly announced. I presented Sidney's former will for probate, and that was completely insane, since I only had Ann's word for it that the new will had been destroyed. Even though the girl who had typed the new will had married and gone away."

Beebe lifted a hand to adjust his glasses. "I won't say what it was that cured me of my infatuation for Ann Savage. It was—a personal thing, and it was enough to cure me good. I only wish to God it had happened sooner. Of course, I couldn't stop the probate of the will without ruining myself. In May, the estate was distributed, and later that month Ann married Norman Horne. That ended that business, I thought. I had learned my lesson, and it had really been a tough one."

He pulled his shoulders back. "Then, two years later, this jolt came: Sidney was alive and would soon be in New York. You can imagine how it hit me—or maybe you can't. I finally got it in focus enough to see that I had only two choices—either fall out of my office window, or tell Sidney exactly how it had happened. Meanwhile, I had to go through all the motions of talking it over with them, and listening to all their crazy suggestions. It wasn't until Monday, day before yesterday, that I decided, and I phoned Ann the next morning,

yesterday, that I was going to see Sidney that evening and tell him the whole story. Then came the news that Sidney had been murdered. I don't know who killed him. All I know is what I'm telling you, and of course, for me, that's enough." He stopped for his mouth to do little spasms. He tagged it: "As a counselor-at-law I'm through."

I was a little disappointed with Norman Horne. Surely, he might have been expected to react manfully and promptly to such an indictment of his attractive wife, but he wasn't even looking at Beebe. He was looking at her, there beside him, and it was not a gaze of loyal and trusting faith. It was just as well that she didn't see it.

She didn't see it because her eyes were on Wolfe. "Is he through?"

"Apparently, madam, yes. At least, for the moment. Would you like to comment?"

"I don't want to make a speech. I don't think I need to. Just that he's a liar. Just lies."

Wolfe shook his head. "I doubt if that's adequate. It wasn't all lies, you well know. I strongly advise you either to keep silent, even though that would expose you to an adverse presumption, or to tell the truth without reservation. You warned Mr. Beebe of the hazard of an improvised complex lie. I urge you to heed your own warning. Now?"

She looked at Wolfe. "You're quite a performer, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said.

"I believe you already know the truth."

"If so, for you to try to withhold it would be pointless," he stated.

"Well, I'd hate to be pointless. You're right—some of what Jim said was true. He did tell me about the new will—but after the news came that Sidney had been killed in action, not before. He did take it from his safe and let me read it. It did leave everything to Caroline. He said that no one knew its contents except his former secretary, and she had married and gone to some little town in the South, so she was out of the way. He said there was no other copy of it, and that he was sure Caroline didn't know about it because she showed him Sidney's letter. He said he would destroy the will, and I, my mother, and my brother would inherit under the previous will—but only if I would marry him.

"I don't need to tell you how I really felt about marrying the money-grubbing little snake. I didn't tell him. I agreed to it. I suppose you don't care what I thought, but Sidney was dead, and I thought it was only fair for us to get a share. So I agreed, but I never had any intention of marrying Jim Beebe. He wanted an immediate wedding, before he presented the will for probate, but I talked him out of that, and our engagement was announced. When the will went through and the estate was distributed, I married Norman Horne.

I didn't know whether Jim had destroyed the new will or not, but that didn't matter, because he wouldn't dare to produce it then." She fluttered a hand. "That's all."

"Not quite," Wolfe objected. "The sequel. Mr. Karnow's return."

"Oh, yes. Of course, Jim killed him. It's funny about Sidney's turning up alive. You may not believe it, but, in a way, I was glad of it, because I always liked him. I was sorry for Caroline and Paul, because I liked them, too. But I knew Sidney wouldn't try to get our share back from us. There was just one person who didn't dare to face him. Of course, Jim did face him when he went to his hotel room, but he wasn't facing him when he killed him—he shot him in the back of the head." She turned to Beebe: "Did you tell him about the will, Jim? I'll bet you didn't. I'll bet he never knew." She turned back

to Wolfe: "Will that do for the truth?"

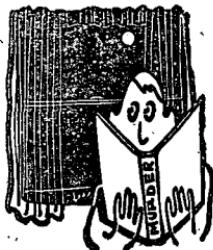
"It'll do for a malicious lie," Beebe squeaked.

Wolfe addressed the law: "I would prefer, Mr. Cramer, to turn the issue of veracity over to you. In my opinion, Mr. Beebe fumbled it and Mrs. Horne didn't."

At a later date, in a courtroom, a jury concurred. Justice is a fine thing, but that night in Wolfe's office it slipped up on one detail. After Cramer and Stebbins escorted Beebe out, and the others had gone, Caroline Karnow decided to return the kiss she had received in that room twelve hours earlier. I stood there waiting. But she went right past me, around to Wolfe behind his desk, put her arms around his neck, and gave it to him.

He growled, but I think he liked it.

"Wrong address," I said bitterly



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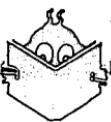
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BOX SCORE FOR 1962

In editing his first volume of the **BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR** (published in July 1963 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories as the best short stories and novelettes of 1962, and listed 80 other stories in his Honor Roll—a total of 96 distinguished stories of which 9 were published only in books and 87 appeared in American magazines during 1962.

Here is the box score for the 87 magazine stories:

<i>name of magazine</i>	<i>number of Honor Roll stories</i>	<i>percentage</i>
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	38	43.6%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	12	13.8%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	12	13.8%
Playboy	5	5.7%
Manhunt	5	5.7%
Cosmopolitan	4	4.6%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	3	3.4%
Saturday Evening Post	2	2.3%
New Yorker	2	2.3%
Argosy	1	1.2%
Esquire	1	1.2%
Rogue	1	1.2%
Baker Street Journal	1	1.2%



*A preview of coming attractions from *Inner Sanctum* Mysteries*

VIRGIN LUCK by Laurence Meynell

The wittiest, sexiest, most villainous heroine in many a year gets involved with a British bookmaking establishment, a dangerous gigolo, embezzlement and — murder — in this fast-paced, imported mystery. March \$3.50

TREAD SOFTLY by Frances Rickett

A seven-year-old girl is the only witness to a hit-and-run killing. Her teenage babysitter is the only one who can protect her from the murderer. A novel of unusual tension and suspense. April \$3.50

TO HIDE A ROGUE by Thomas Walsh

Lieutenant Harry McKenna of the City Transit Police tracks down a vicious escaped convict and discovers that his fiancee is involved with the criminal. An exciting novel of murder and extortion by the winner of the 1st *Inner Sanctum* Mystery Award. May \$3.50

TRAP FOR CINDERELLA

by Sébastien Japrisot

Winner of *Le Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière*. Murder and mixed identity on the French Riviera in a brilliant narrative of paradox and twisted intention by a master of the French mystery genre. June \$3.50

SIMON AND SCHUSTER

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How to write for television

By Max Shulman



If you are interested in writing and would like to see your work produced on TV, you have a chance of breaking in today. Television has turned out to be an insatiable maw which devours scripts at a rate unprecedented in the history of entertainment.

When I was running the *Dobie Gillis* show, I paid \$2,500 and often more for a script — and still had trouble finding enough usable material. That's one reason why I joined with Rod Serling (creator of *The Twilight Zone*, winner of five Emmy Awards) and ten other leading authors* to start the Famous Writers School. We pooled everything we had learned in our long years in the business to devise four professional writing courses that men and women, seriously interested in writing, could take in their own homes in their free time.

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